

*By the same Author*

CRUMP FOLK GOING HOME  
THE LONELY PLOUGH  
T OLD ROAD FROM SPAIN  
BEAUTIFUL END  
T SPLENDID FAIR G  
(*Femina-Vie Heureuse Prize*)  
T TRUMPET IN T DUST  
T THINGS WHICH BELONG——  
-WHO-CAME?

THE WISDOM OF  
THE SIMPLE  
*AND OTHER STORIES*

*By*  
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# STORIES OF THE LAND



## AFTER-GLOW

### I

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS is all very well (said the land-agent to the clever pupil), but I'm tired of hearing it applied to this estate. All the same, it's true enough that people do hide away in themselves what they don't want to remember—hide it so successfully, sometimes, that, as far as they're concerned, it's just as if it had never been.

I'll give you an instance—one that came under my notice long before anybody had ever heard of your pet piffle. It was when I went to my first job as agent to Sir John Wharton—'Old Sir John', as they called him right and left, for he was old even when I went, eighty at least, with a wife a year or two younger. A fine old man he was, too, one of the real old school, with splendid manners and a face that looked as if it had been carved on purpose to illustrate them. The estate was a good one, with plenty of money at the fountain-head, money that was spent on the place liberally, and yet as wisely as it ever is in this essentially unwise world. Altogether it was a first-class job, and I was lucky to get it. I was happy there, too, until the old people died, and the property went to an old maid of a son with mad socialist ideas, who tried to turn it into a sort of Exeter Hall generally. Of course there were the usual awful rows which follow this sort of thing, and in which the agent plays the time-honoured but boring part of Aunt Sally. I got

tired of it, after a while, and left, but that has nothing to do with this present story

There was a crowd of old servants on the place, as there always is when the master is old, too, though in any case the treatment was so good that anybody who was lucky enough to get in took care to stay for ever, and after that They were a decent enough lot, as estate servants go, and I got on very well with them, on the whole Some of them, as was natural, could teach me a good deal, and I'm glad to say I wasn't above letting them (Here the agent looked, as if by complete accident, at the 'mud pup') One or two became almost like fathers to me before they retired or reluctantly died off, but the one I was fondest of w old Weston, the head keeper

They'd a custom on that estate of presenting a gold watch to anybody who had been in their employ for as long as fifty years, and, shortly after I got there, Weston's turn fell due

One morning—in the autumn it was—I received a summons to the Hall, and found the old people in solemn conclave over a jeweller's packet, upon which I, too, was asked to pronounce judgment. It was almost the first time I had seen old Lady Wharton, and, perhaps with reason, I was far

more interested in her than I was in the old watches. She was taller than Sir John, and very much straighter, and there was a sort of hushed stateliness about her that made you feel you ought always to be taking off your hat—even if it happened to be off already She had snow-white hair and dark eyes, and she spoke in a slow but beautifully-modulated voice. Her hands

were the only things about her that didn't seem quite in keeping—large hands and very square; surprisingly capable-looking hands I couldn't help noticing them, because she kept stretching them out to pick up the watches while we made our decision

'Not too heavy,' old Sir John said, peering at them through his pince-nez 'A heavy watch . . . rather a bore'

'Not too light, either,' supplemented his wife 'That one is almost like a lady's. Something plain and good'

'Like old Weston himself,' Sir John chuckled, looking at me 'He's plain enough, the Lord knows, though he's a d—d good sort!'

'He has proved himself a faithful servant,' Lady Wharton said, in her impressive tones, and somehow I was sure that Sir John, too, felt as if he ought to be taking off his hat . . . 'What do you think of that one, Mr Lane?'

She passed it on to me as she spoke, and again I found myself looking at her hand rather than the object in question I pulled myself together, however, and said all the things that I thought she wished me to say, evidently successfully, for she smiled faintly

'Then we'll decide on that,' she announced at last, as she laid it aside 'And now, what about the inscription?'

We had nearly half an hour's tussle over that, too, trying to compress the attributes of the faithful servant, his term of service, and the appreciation of his employers into the narrow compass of a watch-lid In the end it ran something like the following.—'Presented by Sir John

and Lady Wharton to James Weston, in recognition of his faithful services during fifty years on the Wharton estate,'—and, of course, the dates Sir John tried to pooh-pooh the 'faithful', and would even have dispensed with 'services' as well, but Lady Wharton stuck to both of them 'Faithful service is the most beautiful attribute of that class,' she insisted firmly, 'and we should never hesitate to put our appreciation of it into words.'

She passed me the slip of paper upon which she had written the inscription in a large, careful hand, again smiling faintly as our eyes met. Reading the thing afterwards, I was surprised to find that an 'h' was missing from one of the 'Whartons'. I reminded myself, however, that she was an old woman, and probably blinder than she would admit. Besides, even at that early stage I had had occasion to observe that spelling is not necessarily the aristocrat's strongest suit.

The presentation to old Weston was made at the workpeople's supper, an annual event which took place about Christmas. Sir John and Lady Wharton always attended this function, so I was told—sat valiantly through a lengthy meal, clouds of rank tobacco smoke, and the fumes of a powerful punch, and were invariably in bed for the best part of a week afterwards. My estate clerk, who had not been on the spot much longer than I had, but who was much more apt at gleaning details of interest, gave me to understand that the old people were tremendous sticklers for etiquette and tradition.

'It's the old lady, chiefly,' he informed me,

kindly 'She's dead nuts on doing exactly what every other Lady Wharton has done before her. She'd sit through that supper if she died in the last five minutes. Sir John's a genial old bird, really, in fact, they say he was as wild as they make 'em, when he was young. Some of the oldest workmen are rather sniggering about this presentation, because they say Sir John and old Weston had a tremendous turn-up when Weston first came. He was underkeeper then, and Sir John a young sprig not yet come into the title, and apparently they fell foul of each other over the head keeper's daughter, a fine, handsome girl, who was carrying on with both of them. They even fought it out with bare fists in the Crowflyers' Wood—midnight, it was, and with only the stars looking on to see fair play. I haven't got it out of the folks yet how it all worked out, but I gather it was all hushed up, and that they both married and settled down. Sir John's made the best of landowners, and Weston the best of keepers, but still, it *is* rather a joke, isn't it, when you remember that old scrap!'

Weston was informed, of course, of the forthcoming presentation, so that he might prepare a suitable speech, and, whenever I could, I spared an evening to help him. We used to sit one at each side of his kitchen fire, while he looked across at me with his faded blue eyes, patiently trying to assimilate the ridiculous language considered necessary to these occasions. 'Say it your own way!' I used to break out at last, when he had forgotten for the twentieth time whether he should put Sir John or her

## STORIES OF THE LAND

ladyship first 'Say whatever comes into your head, they'll like that better than anything ade up' But he wouldn't hear of it.

'Nay, we mun have everything just so' he would answer, shaking his head, and back we would go to our set phrases We even took it in turns to stand up and harangue an invisible crowd, varying the procedure with magnificent gestures and courtly bows The final event was always the same—loud bursts of laughter on my part, and silent but side-splitting mirth on his, followed by exhausted subsidence into chairs, and a diminishing chuckle over pipes. But always, too, he came back with renewed earnestness to the problem 'We mun have it all just so,' he used to repeat, returning patiently to the attack

The part of learner, however, was not, as I said before, played by him alone, for I received a royal education from him before our connection came to an end But it was an education almost entirely confined to the natural world, into which humans, as it were, poked their noses only by accident It was true that now and then he gave me thumb-nail sketches of people out of the past, such keepers and squires, with an occasional hint of his dead wife, but chiefly his talk was of fur and feather Of Sir John, he said simply that they had been lads together and grown old together, and that there wasn't a better aster in the countryside If, by any chance, a brand from the ancient battle still flickered faintly in his soul, there was no evidence of it in his manner He was full of dignified gratitude for the forthcoming watch, as well

intense anxiety to meet the occasion in the most decorous fashion

'I take it right kind of Sir John and her ladyship,' he used to repeat, 'and I hope I'll have the nous to say so when the moment comes How d'you think I ought to put yon bit about thanking 'em for things better than watch , Mr Lane? Best have it over agen, sir, if you don't mind We mun have everything just so'

## II

Out of a white world of frost-jewelled snow we came into the yellow comfort of the Gun-Dog Inn . . . We were glad enough of it at first, but it was too much even for me, young and strong

I was, and with my lungs full of day-long fr h air, by the end of the evening There were times when, through the smoke and heat of the roo , the faces of the assembly positively danced before me, the worn, weather-beaten countenances of the elders, and the smooth, clear-skinned, solemn faces of the lads The clink of china and glass, the rise and fall of the gruff talk, interspersed by occasional bursts of laughter, the shuffling of heavy boots under the table, ended by having an almost hypnotic effect on my blurring brain Yet through it all the couple at the table-head sat s iling and straight, their quiet eyes turning gently fro face to face, th r clear, musical-sounding voic addressing first one and then another Sir John, indeed, or, at least, so I thought, began to tire a little before the finish, sinking slightly in h chair, and showing fatigue in the hollowne of his ey and the sharpenin of his fine featur Lady

Wharton's back, however, continued so erect that it made me ache even to look at her. A little flush came into her old cheeks, a little sparkle into her old eyes. She had come into the room like a queen, and like a queen had gone from one to the other of the older servants, questioning, sympathising, showing a marvellous memory and intuition. Over and over again I heard some intimate reference to sons and daughters, some diagnosis of an apparently obscure illness, some royal sureness about a name, that testified to her wonderful powers. With Weston himself she had shaken hands, hinting, as she did so, at the central incident of the occasion. As Sir John's spirit seemed to sink during the long evening, hers actually seemed to rise. She drew a long breath from time to time, but it was hardly a breath of discomfort. On the contrary, she seemed to be upheld by some inward and personal power, some consciousness of satisfaction to which she alone had the key.

Weston was seated at her right hand, and throughout the meal she talked to him in her clear, languid, but gracious voice, the purport of which it was easy enough to overhear if one chose to listen. Even at my end of the table, where I sat facing my employers, and with my own burden of conversation to sustain on either side, I gathered a fair impression of what the Squie's lady was saying to the old keeper. That the word 'faithful' at least played a prominent part in it, I was aware, comparisons between past and present-day loyalty, memories of old happenings, together with talk of traditions that

had held good when the two of them were young. And along with all this a more personal note was struck—inquiries after his health and his satisfaction with life, tactful touches upon his wife, his children—even, indeed, his many grandchildren.

Weston answered her briefly, but always courteously, once, I saw, coloured at some compliment, as if pleased, but he never lifted his eyes to her during the meal. For the most part he sat with bent head staring at cloth or plate, but plying a good knife and fork, nevertheless I guessed that his mind was busy with the presentation that was to come, and especially with that speech of his which was to crown the proceedings. He had buttonholed me the moment I arrived, and in a secluded corner had forced me to put him finally through his paces. Now, as my eyes came round to him from time to time, I could hear, as plainly as if he were speaking them, the pompous, conventional phrases that were teasing his simple brain.

Sir John rose at last, and called for attention, while I, leaving my seat, walked round to the table-head to lay the case containing the watch in front of the old lady. Opening it, she held it up to me with a few whispered words, flashing upon me that faint smile that seemed actually to confer a decoration upon its wearer. I stole back to my seat with Sir John already in full flood, my eyes full of that smile, and of that large, capable hand, which looked as though it would never release what it had once grasped . . .

Sir John's was a good speech, the speech of a gentleman, a man and a friend, and my respect for him mounted with every syllable. That Weston was popular was evidenced by the applause which greeted the numerous compliments to his address, and when Lady Wharton rose to hand him the watch, it was in an atmosphere of general satisfaction.

Weston, of course, had risen, too, though his head was still bent, and there was still that air of worried preoccupation on his wise and patient face. He put out his hand, however, to take the case, and for a moment keeper and Squire's lady stood linked by the leather square. The next instant, though, she had sunk gracefully into her chair, and we were all waiting for Weston's speech. In a fever of anxiety lest he should make a mess of things, I sent out a telepathic message so violently concentrated that he must almost have felt as if I had nudged him. In any case, he responded at once, lifting his eyes for the first time to the still faintly smiling face. 'I take it right kind of Sir John and your ladyship,' he began mechanically, as if pulled by a string, and then—'Nay, by God, but I don't!' he volleyed suddenly, and flung the case on the cloth. The watch leaped from its bed and slithered noisily on to the floor, while the old keeper, thrusting back his chair so roughly that it fell to the ground, took himself out of the room with a scowl and a banged door . . .

There was the ~~h~~ of shock over the company for a long moment, and then the old head carpenter to the right of me chuckled softly. Paralysed both by horror and interest, I stared

at Sir John and his lady, side by side in their châus. The old man, reddened a little, and sunk still further upon himself, was smiling a half-apologetic smile, while his hand beat a nervous tattoo in front of him on the cloth. But on Lady Wharton's face, turned after the offender and towards the door, there was nothing but hurt dignity, pity, and troubled surprise. She leaned forward presently, saying—'Somebody should go after the poor old man!—but nobody stirred. The faces of the older servants reflected their master's diffident smile. They remembered, he remembered, old Weston had suddenly remembered. It was only she who never for an instant remembered . or fathomed or even subconsciously guessed .

'But what *should* she have remembered?' demanded the 'mud pup', his eyes wide with puzzle.

The agent took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked at it thoughtfully.

'Well, you see . . . she was the girl . . .'

## THE LAST PLANTATION

### I

OUT on the terrace, where the spread tails of the peacocks looked like painted fans against the stone of the balustrade, Armistead of Broom Hall stood and stared at the desolation he had made of the park. Behind him, beyond one of the French windows of the big house, his wife idled with some coloured patterns, while in and out of the pergola at the terrace end his baby son played with a spaniel whose coat shone black against the rambler rose.

Armistead frowned as he leaned against the coping of the balustrade. His blue eyes under their black brows were at the same time restless and sullen. His big muscular figure and handsome face were already too heavy for his thirty-five years. In his riding-clothes and long boots he looked the typical hunting, drinking, cock-fighting young squire of a generation past, a type which, though extinct as a class, survives in exceptional cases even to-day. Lionel Armistead's place and generation were long since gone, as even he rather vaguely recognised. It was not often that he troubled himself to reckon definitely with life, but, when he did, he was conscious of having been cheated and left behind.

He frowned as he stared at the park from which he had swept the clustered plantations one by one, but not from any sensation of remorse. It was true that his eye, roving the

scene, still asked for all it missed, for the long line of wood that had masked the Home Farm and its many buildings, the splendid colonies of Douglas fir which had flanked each wing of the Hall, and the larch wood on the top of the hill which had barred the sunset over the sea. Others, too, though hidden from him by the swell of the land, his inward eye asked urgently for those. But though custom compelled the demand, he yet had no feeling of sorrow for what he had done. On the contrary, he clenched his hands in a passion of rage because it was not all to do again.

Yet even while he looked around from one new-sown patch to another, at the mended fences that marked where the timber-waggons had passed, and the ruts in the earth that testified to the wheels, he still kept his eye away from the one plantation that remained. Always it passed it by, leaped it, shut it out, in spite of the hunger in his grudging heart. His face, turned towards it, yet ignoring its presence between the Dower House and the Hall, was like that of a sulky dog set unwillingly on trust. Sometimes, when his mood was kindlier, it held a better look than that, more the look of a hulking sinner humble before some shrine. But to-day he was idle and bitter, and his face was hard. He did not look at the last plantation simply because he did not dare.

His wife came out to him after a while, and slipped a hand through his careless arm. She was a plump, fair woman, not of his own class, a fact which his taste approved and his breeding resented. She held up the patterns for his

inspection, and he said—‘Rippin’! Tophole Put your money on that!’ without once looking at them Her thin, common voice, passing fro one subject to another, struck against him like weak rain without power to stir him. He did not pay much attention to her at any time, and he paid less now He was too busy keeping his eye from resting on the plantation, the planta-  
tion to which it drew nearer and nearer every  
ti e that it swept the scene .

His absorption led her at last to look abroad also ‘Looks rather lost, doesn’t it?’ she ob-  
served, though without much interest ‘I sup-  
pose we shall get used to it, but it seems horribly  
bare One likes the place to look nice when  
people come, but after all it’s worth it when  
you think of the money ’

He gave a short, sullen laugh ‘Thousands,—  
that’s what it means! Oh, yes, it’s worth it,  
right enough ’ and suddenly his eye, creeping  
up to the forbidden place, came to a halt and  
fastened itself on an overhanging branch ..

‘And we need it, oodness knows, what with  
super-tax and the rest! You’ve such expensive  
tastes, too, Lal,—oh, of course you’ll say, so  
have I! But you never see to remember that  
there’s been a war ’

‘Don’t I?’ His tone sounded fierce and sulky  
usual, and she had never discovered whether  
it covered anything else His glance had crept  
farther into the wood by now, and stayed itself  
covetously on the trunk of an ash .

‘Oh, well,’ she hurried on quickly, with a  
feeble attempt at tolerance, ‘I suppose it’s  
different for the en who stayed at ho e...’

She took her hand from his arm and trailed away towards the child, but he paid no attention to her languid going. Rigid, scarcely breathing, he was staring into the very heart of the wood, counting and classing as well as he was able.

Long after, as it seemed, he found his wife again at his elbow. 'It does look lost!' she began again in discontented tones, — 'like Belgium or France . . .' and suddenly her words hurried him into growing decision. 'That's got to go, too!' he said in a thick voice, and flung out his arm towards the last plantation.

She shrank away from him at the words, looking horrified and almost frightened. 'Oh, but you can't, Lal!' she exclaimed, and her colour rose and her eyes filled. She looked across at the last plantation as if it was something human that he threatened. 'Oh, but you can't, Lal!' she said again.

'It's mine,' he said sulkily, setting his heavy jaw.

'Yes, but——' Her voice broke in her throat, and she fell silent, looking helplessly at the group of trees. 'People will talk,' she added, after the empty pause.

He shrugged his shoulders at that, and swung round to leave the terrace. 'I'm goin' over to tell Cecily about it now,' he threw over his shoulder, turning towards the stables. 'The stuff's mine I can do as I like. Only fair to warn her, though. Must do the decent thing.'

'It will bring bad luck!' his wife called after his broad back, making a last effort. There w

a look of real horror on her face 'People will talk!' she finished again feebly, and he laughed contemptuously. The hunger that was gnawing within him would not let him stop now that he had once started. Already he felt better for having made the decision. There was still timber for felling and selling in Broom Hall Park.

## II

He ordered his horse and rode away across the good turf in the English sunlight. Bare though the land looked by comparison with what it had been, there was still no denying its mellow beauty 'Belgium or France !' He laughed again, looking round him with cynical eyes. She little knew how her idle words had stiffened him in his halting purpose.

He looked well in the saddle. His hunter, a big bay, seemed to make little of his weight, though he rode nearly twenty stone. He had always been proud of his physique, and inclined to sneer at his elder brother, who was small and slight, until that War came along which put so many sneers on different mouths. Barney had been master at the Hall then, and he himself only younger brother and hanger-on, leading the reckless irrational life of the generation to which by rights he belonged. But you cannot sup with the devil without having to pay the score, and though both brothers were keen to join when the country called, it was only Barnaby who succeeded in getting through. Lal had tried every possible fighting avenue after his turning-down, only inevitably to be turned down again. He was not married at the

time, and Barney was, which put an even finer point upon the position. It was only later that he had married Kitty Mason, the school-teacher, in the casual, half-accidental way of the generation to which he belonged. Before that happened, however, the German guns had succeeded in finding Barney, small as he was, and sent him home to the Hall to die, and presently the younger brother was master in Barney's place, and Barney's childless widow had struck her flag and gone to the Dower House on the further side of the park.

Lal, denied his supreme wish, had made a few blundering attempts to serve his country in other directions. For a time he sat on tribunals, agricultural committees, and other engines of war, but it was not often that he understood what was going on, and he almost invariably fell asleep. The gifts of the generation to which by rights he belonged did not lie in the direction of strenuous public work. Gradually he fell away from them as his uselessness was forced home to him, and back again, as far as times would allow, to his reckless way of living. Without actually receiving white feathers, he was yet made to feel that such shoulders as his ought to be helping to carry the country, and the unexpressed doubt drove his bitterness deeper. He had earned a bad enough name for himself in the old days, but he earned a worse one now. No generation is tolerant of belated survivals, least of all in the terrible stress and need of a great war.

The growing value of timber had at length come in some sort to his rescue, drawing him

away for the time being from his cock-fighting and pot-house brawls. There was first-class timber in and around the park, and it was with almost demoniac zest that he joined in the general sweeping away of English woods. Not only did he superintend operations, but he worked with his own hands, exciting still further question as to his physical fitness. He was more than glad of the money, of course, for the War was hitting one whose pocket had a natural hole in it, and he took care to get it. It was said of him at last that there was nothing he would not sell, either living or dead, and another black mark went up against his name as a foil to his dead brother's D S O.

He was nearing the plantation now, checking his horse continually as it tried to break into a canter, as if at the same time he tried to check something urgent and pressing within himself. The line between Dower House and Hall ran straight beside its fence, so that without turning aside he could look into its depths. The actual wood stood upon level ground, but on the Hall side of it the park dropped sheer into the Devil's Punch Bowl, one of those huge grassy cups which the ages have left for our surprise. Lal, looking down the steep slope, saw a few cattle grazing at the bottom, and a toylike figure or two staring up startled at his passing by. The Punch Bowl was an irresistible lure to trespassing trippers during the summer months, as well as his brother's grave in the cool heart of the whispering wood.

He stopped at last by the fence and looked across to the pale gleam of marble that carried

his brother's name, the wrought-iron railing clustered thick with living roses, and the surrounding stretch of turf that his gardeners kept like a lawn. In the core of the dark plantation the grave had the effect of a shrine, a sacred place consecrated to dead youth and valour. Barney had asked to be buried there, instead of down in the churchyard close to the river, and in spite of some opposition he had had his way. Nobody who had been present that day would forget the lengthy procession across the park, the soundless progress of the gun-carriage along the turf, the gleam of the flag against the young spring afternoon, the sharp crack of the last salute in the depths of the wood, the soft blue of the rifle-smoke against the dark firs as it floated and shredded away. Last of all, from the heart of the wood, carried into the village and out to the Hall, so that wherever men heard it they halted and took off their hats, had come the calm, sane, but heart-breaking music of the Last Post.

Lal, looking, remembered it all, but only shut his mouth and set his jaw. The place, as he came to it now, was indeed a shrine, but when he had done with it, it would be a shrine no longer. The grave, stranded out in the open park, would seem a lonely thing without sense or meaning, little more than a ditch dug for a dog in the all-accommodating earth. Cattle and sheep would browse close about it, children quarrel, trippers scramble and stand and stare. . . . The horror of what he proposed to do swept over him for a moment, shaming him so that he almost turned his horse's head.

But there was money in the wood, big timber and sound,—timber that made of his brother's tomb a costly resting-place indeed. With a covetous glance he ran his eye over the tall trunks, classing, assessing, hearing already the rasp of the saw and the ring of the axe. The horror faded. With the pressure of his heel he pushed his mount forward, and loosed the rein in a canter both to the horse and the thing that was in his soul.

### III

He found his sister-in-law at home and in the room where she always sat, a pleasant room with deep windows facing the park and the doomed plantation. Cecily, setting long-stemmed flowers in tall glasses, greeted him with her usual smile. She was fond of Lal for Barney's sake, and for Barney's sake forbore to judge him. 'Lal belongs to another age than ours,' he had said once, 'a simpler, more primitive, younger, less subtle age. The children of our generation are grown-up almost in their cradles, but Lal belongs to a generation that often never grew up at all. He's got to live as they did. Perhaps he'll die as they did . . . In any case, it's no use being hard.'

She looked now at the heavy figure seated by the table, the heavy, sulky face and the handsome, sullen eyes. Her own, calm and kind, met them from time to time, but could not hold them. Always they switched back again to the plantation, that cool, dark place in the heat of the summer day. Yet the conversation drifted on idly without including it, and in the end it was Cecily herself who brought it to his lips.

'You've spoilt the park, Lal' she said at last, turning her head to follow the direction of his glance. She spoke rather sadly, but without any suggestion of reproof. 'I suppose it was necessary to do it, but I shall so miss the autumn tints when the time for them comes round.'

He flushed, drumming with restless fingers on the polished table.

'Valuable timber, you know,' he muttered awkwardly. 'Makes no end. Must do all we can to keep up the shop in these rottenly hard-up times.'

'I know.' She gave a little sigh. 'I'm a charge on the estate myself, for the matter of that.' He growled an attempt at a protest, and she hurried on. 'At all events, I suppose you'll be through with your cutting now.'

He cleared his throat then, and tried to stiffen his back. 'Not quite,' he began. 'I want—' His eyes fled back to the plantation and, as on the terrace, he flung out a hungry arm. 'That's got to come down, too.'

'Lal!' He knew, without looking at her, that she had risen to her feet, but he would not face her. He continued to stare out at the object of his desire. There was a pause, and then she said, quite lightly and gently—'Of course, Lal dear, you don't mean that.'

'Yes, I do. That's what I came to tell you. That plantation's got to go, too.'

'No,' she said.

'Yes' Opposition was hardening him, making him less afraid of speech. 'There's money locked up in that wood,' he went on brutally. 'It's valuable, I tell you. There's some rattlin'

good ash, for one thing, and you know what that's fetchin' Money locked up no earthly . no d—d good at all ,

She sat down slowly, trying to control herself, trying to be just, to remember Barney's words She knew what they said about Lal, that he would sell his mother and skin a stone, but she did not want to think hardly of him if she could help it Yet his eyes, resting on her precious wood, had a look in them that made her shrink, it was so savage, covetous, full of hate and greed

'Do you need the money so badly, Lal?' she asked him wistfully 'Is that it? Is that all?'

He attempted a scornful laugh, but the hand on the table clenched itself suddenly as if it held the haft of an axe

'Enough, isn't it? Can't have too much Anyway, I've made up my mind the stuff's got to come down'

'But, Lal'— she took a grip on herself and her treacherous voice—'you've forgotten—Barney's grave'

'No, I haven't I shan't disturb it I'll see it comes to no harm The trees have got to come down, that's all'

'But they're Barney's trees!' Her voice rose in a tiny wail

'No, they're not They're mine Everything's mine'

'In one sense,—yes, but not in another They're his monument, his—his shrine, his guard of honour They take care of him when the wind blows and the rain falls They're his trees' She w almost sobbing 'Lal—don't do it!'

'I'm goin' to do it'

'You'll bring dishonour on your name,—on his name,—on your boy's name. Perhaps you'll bring bad luck as well . . . ' She leaned forward across the table, clasping her hands. 'Don't do it, dear!'

'I'm goin' to do it'

He made a violent effort and wrenched himself round to meet her eyes, and at sight of them she pulled herself together (Under her breath she was saying to herself again and again—'One mustn't judge One mustn't be too hard') 'I don't want to hurt you,' he threw out roughly and incoherently 'Don't want to . . . 'Tisn't that. I could have done it without ever tellin' you a d—d word, but I thought it only decent to let you know'

'It was kind,' she said gently, without even a suspicion of irony in her tone, and he stumbled clumsily to his feet

'That's all, then. Don't let's have anythin' more about it. We'll look after the grave, you needn't fear. As for the stuff,' he burst out, violently and inexplicably, 'now that he's dead, poor chap, what do a few trees matter to him any more?'

Something in his voice must have struck her, for she came across to him with a quick movement, laying her hands on his shoulders. The sullen blue eyes moved in circles around her lifted face

'Yes, that's true, Lal!' she answered him in a ringing tone 'He's not there, and it doesn't matter to him now. But it matters to the living that you shouldn't do this thing, it matters to

*you* It's for your own sake I'm asking you not to do it, not for his or for mine, but only for yours'

He was held a moment, not only by the grasp of her slender hands, but by the almost prophetic sound of her strong words A familiar fear came upon him of blindness and loss in an unfamiliar world, and then the hunger rose in him again, suffocating all else He put her from him stubbornly and yet kindly, even patting her clinging hand 'I'm goin' to do it,' he repeated for the third time, and opened the door and blundered out

#### IV

It did not seem very long before the executioners got to work on the guardians of Barney's shrine Almost at once the wood seemed to be full of men, trampling the undergrowth and uprooting the fence, shouting to each other and the horses in long strings of woodmen's oaths All round the plantation were the scars of hoofs and the marks of heavy wheels, and day by day there crept closer a staring, gaping crowd, shocked yet anxious to know what 'yon wastrel' was doing now

Cecily saw the fall of the first tree They dug the soil from the roots of a fine beech and harnessed the horses to the wire about its crown Even from her window she saw the tree quiver at the first pull Slowly it bowed itself and stopped, as if to gaze at the ground where it must lie, then patiently, gracefully, sank upon its face The crash of its fall echoed a short time through Cecily's house, and a long time

through all the hidden places of her wounded heart '.

Yet the fate of the wood had hung in the balance longer than she knew. Lal had had trouble at first with the old forester, and when consent had been wrung from him, much as blood from a stone, he had had further trouble with the men. Some of them had served under the dead Squire, and refused from respect, but the chief snag in the current was superstition. They swore there would be an accident before the work was through, a falling trunk, perhaps, a runaway horse, a slipping axe. It had taken all Lal's influence, his choicest oaths (more than equal to theirs), and in one case an actual fight, before he had succeeded in driving them to the hated task.

Once there, however, they went at it all the harder for not wishing to do it at all, and, day by day, as they toiled, the Squire of Broom Hall laboured, too. Day by day, the big figure in breeches and shirt could be seen plying the axe, leading the horses or straining at the chains. But it was chiefly axe in hand that he moved to and fro among the crashing trees. A kind of exultation seemed to seize him as he hacked at the clean stems, so that the woodmen within reach used to glance uneasily at him as he worked. Yet he was a fine axeman by now, and made a fine figure as he stooped and swung. The rough woodmen, however, were inclined to complain that he was over-rough. There was something vicious about his method, they said, almost as if he was hacking his way through flesh and blood. . . . 'As toppin' as stickin'

Huns!" he used to shout as he swung his axe, and—"There goes a blinkin' Boche!" when a tree went over the edge of the Punch Bowl by mistake

Once Cecily stole up and looked from a hidden place just when the sun was beginning to go down. She saw a tangle of fallen trees with chopped crests, and sandy roots heaving out of the mangled earth. What had been the plantation was now a maze of great holes, crushed undergrowth, crossed and rearing stems. A pile of brushwood was burning in a corner, sending up a thin blue thread of sacrificial smoke. The axes flashed in the sun and the red flame from the slow fire. She heard a sudden oath in a voice that she knew to be Lal's, a rough, exultant laugh, and a snatch of pothouse song.

When the men had gone home she went inside, and picked her way through the chaos until she stood beside the grave. In spite of the forester's care a branch had fallen against the headstone, cracking it across, and one of the fine iron railings was bent and sagged like wire. The rambler was torn and dragged, and the fine square of turf would have to be turfed again. She looked for a long time at her husband's name and at the blue smoke from the fire, and thought of that other smoke she had seen in the heart of the wood, rising and floating and shredding itself on the wings of the soft air . . .

## V

Once again Lal Armistead was riding across to the Dower House with a settled purpose. It was now late autumn, but there was none of the

usual glory of autumn in his damaged park. Here and there, indeed, a standard tree that had been spared still held a torch to beauty, and far away on either side were hedges lovely with turned strips of beech. Further still across the valley the hills were bright with heather and turned bracken, but all alike were already vanishing into the evening tone of grey. As Lal passed the Devil's Punch Bowl he turned his head and glanced down, and saw that it was already filled with a white sea of floating mist.

About twenty yards from the sheer edge was the grave which had once been so warm and embowered in the close guardianship of the trees. The white headstone gleamed in the growing dusk, a lonely thing on the expanse of park that was fast losing its borders in the failing day. The crack was mended, the rail straightened, the turf re-sodded, but in spite of its new fence and the young poplars it looked sadly mean and lost. The place where the wood had been was already greening fast, and in the half-light it was hard to tell which was the new land and which the old. But its absence seemed to alter the whole lie of the park, so that for the moment Lal felt as if he did not know it. Every time he passed the place he had this feeling, and no matter how often he passed he felt always the same shock. Now he even halted a moment as if thinking of turning back, and then the Dower House set a light in its grey face, and he took comfort and cantered on.

There was nobody about to take his horse, so he slipped the rein through the staple at the door and followed the servant in. Cecily was

at work in her usual place and met him kindly as of old. She had never altered her manner towards him because of what he had done to the wood. Always when she felt bitter she seemed to hear her husband's voice, pleading—'One mustn't be angry. One mustn't be too hard.'

Lal looked ill, she thought, tired and a shade thinner, but she was almost sure that he looked happier. He made his usual difficult, plunging conversation, and then as usual ground to a stop. Remembering a previous occasion, she wondered what was coming next.

'Timber made a good price,' he got out at last. 'That wood, you know—the last plantation Rattlin' good stuff—the best stuff of the lot. Seems to me, thinkin' it over, the money ought to be yours.'

He put a hand in his pocket, and shuffled some papers awkwardly towards her. She took them in silence, and, looking down, saw that they were scrip for several hundreds of pounds.

'War Loan?' she asked quietly, and he said 'Vict'ry Bonds,' in a shamed tone, and suddenly she put up her hands to her face and began to laugh. Presently it was hard to tell whether she laughed or cried, and he leaned back in his chair, watching her with a troubled frown. Somehow the gift hurt her as nothing had hurt her since Barney had died, more than loneliness or neglect, or even the terrible thing that Lal had done to her sacred place. He offered her War Loan for the salving of his own conscience, and for her healing who had not only lent but given to the War everything that she had! She

could have struck him for the cruelty of his ignorance and stupidity, and then, looking up through her tears, saw his troubled eyes watching her, and they were the eyes of a puzzled child. She remembered Barney again then, and drew a long breath and tried to smile.

Gently she pushed the papers back across the table.

'It's very good of you, Lal, but I don't want it,—I don't, indeed I've all I need in that way, and more. Take care of it for that nice boy of yours, who is growing so like my poor dear.'

'You're goin' to take it!' he said gruffly and persistently, just as he had once said—'I'm goin' to do it.' 'You've got to, you're goin' to take it.' He had a swift picture of her position, robbed of husband, home and child. 'Seems to me I've got everythin' and you nothin'.' 'Tisn't right.'

'Tisn't fair.'

For the first time he saw her eyes flash. 'Everything?' she asked, with such a passion of pride in her voice that it rang like a bell, and her glance swept round to Barney's khaki portrait on a table near. The blood rushed into Lal's face until he was almost blind, and he leaned forward, hiding it in his hands.

Instantly she was at his shoulder, bending over him, pleading for forgiveness, trying to explain, to shield, to cover. But for once Lal had found words that hung together for more than a couple of seconds, and she fell silent, listening, wondering, trying with every nerve to understand.

'They told me I'd jiggered my heart, the blighters, and they wouldn't have me. I w-

burstin' to go, and they wouldn't have me. The thing kept eatin' at me all the time, and there was nothin' to do. The trees were the only show I had, and I had to take it. I used to think I was fightin'!—dam silly, but I was happy while I was at it. I didn't mean ever to touch that wood, but the thing was eatin' me, fairly eatin'. Perhaps I was jealous, too, of the poor old chap, but anyway he wouldn't have minded. I've felt a lot more settled since it was down, somehow it's stopped the eatin'. Anyway, it wasn't to hurt you, you know. See, can you? Understand?"

"I understand," she said. "Don't think any more about it. It's finished. Forget it."

"And you'll forgive me?" he asked. "It wasn't the money,—ever. It was that d—d eatin'."

"Poor old Lal! Yes, yes. I do. I do!"

"They say I've jiggered my heart for good with that axe-business," were his last words from the door. "I shan't keep goin' long. I said just now that I'd everythin', didn't I?—but of course I was wrong. If I hadn't had the trees I should have had nothin'—nothin' . . ." and he opened the door and blundered out.

## VI

Outside he realised that he had stayed longer than he intended, for his horse, chilled to the bone, would hardly allow him to mount. The

moment he was in the saddle it bolted with him across the lawn, taking the hedge into the park as it loomed up suddenly in its stride. It was now almost dark, and the land that he had changed with his own hands seemed utterly

new and strange. As he sat back in the saddle, fighting for his horse's mouth, he felt as if the racing hoofs were carrying him into the very void itself. He remembered, however, that the line ran straight between Dower House and Hall, and knew that the horse would keep itself right by the fence surrounding the last plantation. And then, as he galloped into the night, he remembered that now there was no such thing as the last plantation. . . . He had a sudden impression of white marble, a swift vision of a floating sea of mist, and then he and his horse were over the edge of the Bowl, rolling over and over and over together until they reached the bottom and moved no more. . . .

## THE LAST INCH

THE woods were wet, that morning Horses and men scrambled and slithered on the steep river bank, and when finally the butt of the big beech was drawn out into the open park, it left a deep trench to mark its course Buck Drummond set his men to 'tidy' the big log with the cross-saw, while he himself snugged the tops across to the timber-carriage, which had been left standing on the drive so as to disfigure the turf as little as possible

It had taken six horses to fetch the butt out, six horses straining and scrambling, with chains clanking and brasses swinging Buck Drummond had only a man and a boy to help him, but then Buck was a host in himself He was not only a waggoner born, his father having been one before him, but he was also a born organiser, he was, moreover, an artist Ted Hutchinson, the timber-merchant, counted him his best man—Ted Hutchinson, who could turn out thousands of pounds' worth of Shire horses from his various stables, but was content for his own part to race about the country in a ram-shackle Ford

Buck was young for a foreman, being only about thirty, but his capacity could be gauged by that quaint air of wisdom beyond his age which is also to be seen in a good young dog He was slightly above middle height, with curly sandy hair and a pleasant Scotch face on a beautiful body He was slim but not thin, hard but not stiff, supple but not sinuous His small

feet lifted themselves lightly in their heavy boots His fustians, ungaitered, but tied below the knee like those of his men, took on a grace of their own from the grace of his figure Their soft golden-brown was so exactly suited to the woods that it might have been provided by Nature by way of protective colouring

Good timber-hauling, however, is not only a matter of body but of brains, demanding a knowledge of angles and stresses, together with an eye for delicate adjustments and distribution of weight The born waggoner in Buck came out in the way he sized up his loads before he touched them, the artist in the ease and grace with which he assembled them, the efficient organiser in the fact that he wasted neither time, strength nor speech He could fetch, lift and place a log within five minutes, and without even the slightest appearance of effort or hurry He was unusually quiet, both with his horses and his men, giving few orders, and those almost in an undertone And he never gave an order twice ..

Even apart from these things, he was no mere ignorant carter He knew the market-value of the 'wood', as he called it, that he hauled, where it was going, and what it would be used for at the other end His job had taken him on to various estates up and down the country, and he knew a good many interesting facts about each of them He could make a pretty shrewd guess, too, as to why the timber was coming down, and whether the proceeds would go into Government pockets or those of others

He used only three of his team for taking the

tops up the slight incline that led to the timber-waggon—Lauder, Elspie, and Haig, with Lauder leading as usual. The leader of a timber-team corresponds to the foreman of the gang in that he must have brains, and in this case it was Lauder who had them. He was a brown, about nine years old and as clever as paint, but nothing to look at either from a timber point of view or any other. He was rather under sized for a timber horse, to begin with, and he was thin and rat-tailed, and looked like a bad feeder. Beside Elspie, the chestnut mare, and Haig, the big, placid bay wheeler, he looked like something that ought to have been carting manure on a second-rate holding.

Probably because of his extra intelligence, he was inclined to be temperamental, apt to excite himself if he had a man at his head, and to pull too fiercely, so, because of this idiosyncrasy, Buck worked him by voice alone. Backing up the slope, he called to him by name, and the three horses, taking a circular 'cast' like that of a sheep-dog, followed him with a rush, the log dragging inertly at their heels. If they narrowed the cast by attacking the slope too directly, the log would roll over and refuse to follow, and they would have to be sent back to straighten it up again. Then once more they would make their rush at the little hill, their coats and brasses gleaming in the fresh sunlight that had followed the wet night.

Arrived at the timber-waggon already stationed under the triangular 'legs', the young waggoner loosed Elspie and Haig, afterwards harnessing Lauder alone to the lifting tackle.

Here again he worked him only by voice, often without even glancing in his direction 'Come to me, Lauder' he would call, and Lauder would turn to him like a child, or, 'Another inch' and the brown horse would move backwards or forwards, lowering or lifting the load as the foreman fitted it into position

The first two 'tops' settled themselves comfortably enough, but the third, a heavy, curved bough, with a tiresome twist in it both to right and left, promised to give trouble. Buck lowered it once or twice, only to swing it up again, climbing about the load with that peaceful sureness of his that neither loitered nor hurried. He moved carefully as he prised the logs apart to make a safe resting-place for the awkward customer, for both his boots and the smooth skin of the beech were slippery with the wet. Lauder, harnessed at right angles to the load, moved forward or yielded a step according to order. The big curved limb, swung on block and pulley and clipped by great hooks, hung suspended between the 'legs' like an unusually clumsy sword of Damocles. Buck studied it first from one point and then another, once, when he was on the ground, catching the end of it as it was hauled upwards, and allowing it to lift him completely over the waggon.

Presently, however, he got things as he wanted them, and, climbing back on to the load, steadied the bough as Lauder lowered it for the last time. He lowered it gingerly, as if conscious, even with his back to it, of the delicacy of the operation, and stopping for further orders at discreet intervals 'Another inch' Buck called,

as the bough still hung, and, slipping at that moment on the logs beneath, fell forward across them. Lauder backed obediently without hesitation, lowering the great limb lightly on to the prostrate waggoner

It was so neat and efficient an accident that the neat and efficient mind of Buck Drummond must surely have appreciated it if he had been in a position to do so. That little slip had dropped him face downwards across the load, with the bough not yet wholly in place pinning him across back and elbows. It was pressing on him, but not heavily enough to hurt him, it merely held him there a complete captive. He could neither raise himself by his hands to lever the weight off him, nor turn himself ever so slightly to swing it aside. He felt about cautiously with his feet, but could find no foothold. He was as helpless and as neatly pinned as a trussed chicken. And if Lauder moved again, feeling the weight of the log still more or less on the pulley—well, Buck did not need telling what several tons of 'wood' were capable of doing to you if you happened to be beneath them.

He found presently that he could lift his head just a very little, and by turning his eyes up he could watch the movements of the horse in front of him. He would have called to him to move forward and free him, but he felt too uncertain of his voice in his constricted position. Lauder knew as well as he did that the log ought to be in its place by now, and if he did not recognise his voice, might possibly misinterpret the order. Buck finally decided to wait until the men came up after finishing their cross-sawing, trusting to

Lauder's training to keep him motionless in the meantime

It was wiser to wait—he had settled on that; but however wise it might be, it w certainly not pleasant. Each time his glance climbed from the brown hocks to the brown quarters, he expected to see them giving under the strain. A great stillness seemed to have fallen upon the world, which had lately been so full of cheerful and musical movement—a stillness in which the only sound was the faint buzzing of the cross-saw. The men were still at work, then, he thought to himself, and there was no knowing how long they would be. Certainly, they might wonder, after a while, why he did not return, and climb the little slope to see what kept him. But they were as well aware as he that the last load would probably be difficult to tackle, and so would not expect him to be through with it very soon. And by the time they did begin to think he ought to be finished, it would probably be too late. By that time Lauder would probably have yielded the last inch, letting down the full weight of the big bough upon Ted Hutchinson's best waggoner.

The tiny sound of the cross-saw seemed to go on interminably. It seemed to Buck, listening, that they must have cut the whole of the butt to pieces by now, instead of just trimming off the limb-sockets that would have made it awkward to handle. 'I'll hae to tell 'em off about that,' he said to himself mechanically, forgetting for the moment that he was not in a position to 'tell off' anybody. He remembered it at once, however, because he tried to move a leg,

and found that he was beginning to get cramp. But by this time, indeed, he hardly dared to move at all, in case Lauder, wondering at the silence and wearying of the 'whole business, should take the least motion of the log as an excuse for that last inch.

And still the infinitesimal sound of the crossawing went on. Other sounds came to him presently, equally disturbing, though after another fashion. Elspie and Haig, he could hear, were beginning to fidget, evidently becoming puzzled by the continued lull. Like all well-trained timber-horses, they would stand for hours while work was in progress, but no doubt they found something sinister in this particular pause. He could hear them stamping and fussing behind him, and knew that they were moving about by the sound of the chains. He began to be afraid that they might wander round the waggon in search of amusement, and so irritate or startle Lauder into yielding that last inch.

But still Lauder stood quietly, awaiting the final order. His head was slightly bent as he braced himself against the continued strain. Once he bent it lower still, and the log quivered in response, lifted a useless fraction and settled itself again. Once he switched his rat-tail as if getting impatient, and Buck caught his breath, or would have caught it if the log had not caught it for him already. Once, too, he turned his brown head, though carefully, without moving his body, sending a questioning glance in the direction of the waggon. Buck saw him do it, and was stirred by the humanness of the action into

trying to call to him, only to find that his voice remained in his throat. And still over the little hill the buzz of the cross-saw went on.

Buck did not hear it stop. By that time he was engaged in trying to twist his neck to watch Elspie and Haig, as they came, blundering and inquisitive, round the timber-carnage. The first that he knew of the men was when they were right upon him with frightened shouts, sending his heart into his mouth for fear they should startle Lauder. But Lauder still stood, unstartled, unstirred. He stood while the load was swung aside and the foreman helped into an upright position, while the men, getting no answers to their questions, stood back panting, and when Elspie and Haig had come up and were nosing him fondly but interferingly, Lauder was still standing.

Buck slipped off the waggon without vouchsafing any information to his puzzled underlings. He was a trifle stuff, a trifle red in the face, but otherwise he seemed exactly as usual. Once on the ground, he signalled his men to swing the log back to its former angle. Then—‘Another inch!’ he called to Lauder, and the horse stepped back instantly.

The big bough dropped delicately into place.

## THE SUPREME MOMENT

### I

**H**E was the only person in the yard who didn't know how

There was Varley, the chauffeur, of course, whose manners and morals wouldn't have gained him as much as a groom's place in the old days, but who in these ruled not only the yard but the Squire and the Squire's household as well. There was Spedding, sometimes under-chauffeur and sometimes footman, but always as perfect an imitation of Varley as Nature would allow. There was even Mack, who was his own stable-boy, by rights, but who had just driven off in the runabout with one finger on the wheel, his whole attitude designed to indicate that he was driving by force of character alone.

It was only Bright who didn't know how—the old coachman, the once-king of the yard, now disrespectfully alluded to by the new generation as 'our old woman', the days of whose greatness seeming as remote to their minds the days of their fathers who sported tails.

Yet he was not so old, after all—barely sixty-five, and a lean, muscular sixty-five at that. It was what he represented that was old, that age of hoof and whip that the motor-car had swept into the eternal distance, swept it wholly, as the introduction of steam had once swept it in part. Even to himself it seemed a far cry to the day that had earned him his title of 'Lily Brow Bright'.

In most people's lives there is one supreme moment by which they measure themselves ever after, and which stands in their minds like a peak on a plain. They may cease to speak of it, but they never forget it. In proportion to its effect upon them, they strive to live up to it, fearing lest, by falling below it, they should lose their prerogative in that splendid hour.

Bright's 'moment', coming his way forty years ago, had found him seated at the back of a coach ostensibly driven by the late Squire—'ostensibly', that is, since, in point of fact, the Squire was not in a condition to drive anything but nails into his own coffin. The four-in-hand became a four-very-much-out-of-hand by the time they reached Lily Brow, and went leaping down that narrow, twisting descent like four shots from four separate slings. At the bottom of the hill, where the last evilly-famous curve presented a choice between a ten-foot drop and an eight-foot wall, a pony-carriage, driven by the Squire's wife, appeared placidly creeping up.

Bright had then also become something out of a catapult, had slung himself over the coach, disposed of the Squire, and, with a foot on his chest as he lay on the floor, guided the team to a miraculous safety. The affair had finished with a fight between the two men at the roadside, out of which Bright easily came victor. Certain, in any case, that he would be hanged, he took care to get his sheep, watched with doubting awe by various rustics at the horses' heads, and by the Squire's lady, returned in her carriage, with positive satisfaction.

Of course he was not hanged in any sense of the word, acquired, on the contrary, praise, presentations, and promotion. As 'Lily Brow Bright' he became the hero of the countryside, as well as of the Squire's most popular story. His fame had clung about him like the atmosphere of good leather, but now it was almost gone. Whiff after whiff of petrol had slain that memory of wrestling manhood and straining steed.

Gradually his horses and his honour had faded away from the stable-yard, but something greater than either had faded with them. Gradually Bright himself had become false to his great moment. Gradually his heart had turned to the creatures of spark and steel. Too contemptuous at first even to glance at the clumsy idols which had displaced his own shapely and satin-skinned gods, he came presently not only to glance, but to stare, to study, to covet. The knowledge that he, too, had fallen a victim to the modern obsession was very soon common to the staff.

'Thinks I don't see what he's after!' scoffed Varley to his subordinate. 'Stops and asks questions careless-like, as if for something to say. Over head and ears he is, as anybody might see! Fair breaking his heart to have hold, is our old woman, and that's the truth.'

## II

'Want to see me, Bright?' The present Squire came into the yard. 'Not thinking of retiring, are you? Life in the old dog yet?'

Bright met the jest brightly, looking his youngest sixty-five

'No, sir, I'm not thinking of it, but I'm afraid the old horse is. As for the trap, sir, you might say it's retired already.'

They went together through the deserted stables, turning their eyes instinctively towards each box and stall, as if their one-time occupants were in some sort present to them even yet. Together they shook their heads over the once-smart dog-cart, and drifted on to pass the time of day with the old blue roan. 'Might carry on with *him* a bit longer, sir,' Bright said, lifting a horseman's unconscious hand to the smooth coat, 'but it's no sort of use trying to carry on with that cart.'

'Used for errands mostly, isn't it?' asked the Squire. 'Groceries—letters—any old sort of thing?'

'Shopping generally, sir—laundry—parcels from the station. Doesn't sound much, sir, but the cart's finished even for that. I shouldn't be surprised to come home any day with only the shafts.'

'Odd jobs—and the washing!' the Squire mused. 'Not much of a game for you, Bright, is it, in these motoring days?'

'I don't mind, sir, as long as I'm useful,' Bright was still bright.

'We've got to move on, you know. We've got to move on.' They had moved on actually they talked, and were now facing the open garage. 'We could pick up a cart, I suppose, but then there's the horse . . .' He paused, concentrated upon a Varley industrious beyond belief. 'What do you say to a motor-van?'

Bright's eyes sparkled as they stared at the round

'Just as you please, sir,' he answered modestly

'Think you could manage it?' The Squire's tone was distinctly apologetic.

'I should say I could, sir'

'Oh, well, it's an idea, that's all. Just an idea. We've got to move on.' He faded nervously towards the house. 'Think it over and let me know.'

The blue roan whinnied in the stable . . .

### III

Months went by, during which a light van was put on order, and, as far as could be judged, seemed likely to remain permanently on order. Bright had occasional sinking moments when the Squire, meeting him, would observe 'No sign of that machine yet, Bright. Hardly in your line, though. Perhaps better let it slide' but no steps were taken to see that it actually slid. Horse and trap both mercifully contriving to hold together, the issue was not forced, and meanwhile he had a wonderful time picturing himself as already an adept at the wheel. Those who had happened to meet him just then, carting letters and linen about the roads, might have overheard snatches such as—'Second, I *should* say—Let her in gently—Don't crowd her at the top,' accompanied by strange jerky movements indicating the changing of gears. Only the blue roan, however, was present at these exhibitions, and what the blue roan thought on the subject is not known.

Once, indeed, they encountered young Birkett of the New Rich, tooling a coach with the inexpertness of one whose forebears had been foreign

to the rein, but he was far too busy himself to notice anybody else's antics Bright had thrown a long professional glance over the whole turnout, stopping for the time being his manipulation of invisible levers He had had a moment of envy and aching desire, but it was only a moment He returned happily enough to his self-inculcation of—'Lock over—Change here—Get up your speed before you put her on top '

#### IV

With a proud air he hoisted the laundry-basket into the van—*his* van—incredibly achieved He snapped the doors with a joyous click The three-mile journey before him to the market-town would be his first trip entirely alone Nobody would ever be able to twit him again with not knowing how

The van shone so that it hurt the eye He had spent hours standing over Mack while he cleaned it, and other hours—Mack safely removed—repeating the process himself All the time he was cleaning it he hissed through his teeth, a soft carriage-hiss while he rubbed the body-work, and a loud horse-hiss when he came to the engine .

He slipped the brake, let in the clutch smoothly, and drove carefully out 'There goes our old woman' . Varley, who had condescended to afford him a certain amount of languid instruction, lifted his head at the sound of the engine From a corner a patiently-concealed Mack ran to send a horse-shoe clinking after the car. The blue roan whinnied in the stable . .

Carefully he rounded the curves of the drive,

and pulled up at exactly the right distance to wait for the opening of the gates. He was even able to turn his head for a smile of thanks at the running child. The light van rippled out of the avenue on to the road, and went skimming airily towards Lily Brow.

He was full, as he drove, of a great contentment and a gorgeous pride. The low status of the van was nothing to him, or the laundry-basket at his back. No memory came to shame him of crested harness and shimmering manes. He felt like a god as he dropped down towards the ascent of Lily Brow. *This*, it seemed to him, was the greatest moment of his life, this first, lone, lyrical moment of 'knowing how'.

As he swooped down—'like a blooming bird!' he gurgled ecstatically to himself—a coach and four shot over the top of Lily Brow and came racing towards him. The pace, the swing, the sunlit swirl of dust, all told him what was wrong, even before he glimpsed the agonised face of young Birkett of the New Rich, together with his thin, counter-jumper arms sawing helplessly at the reins. 'Never take the bend on this earth!' Bright said to himself, alluding to the historic spot where the eight-foot wall and the ten-foot drop presented their opposite charms, realising, in the next instant, that he would arrive simultaneously at the same point—also that it would be advisable to put on his brakes—and didn't put them—never did put them .

For in this so-called supreme moment of his for which he had bartered his real moment, Bright's soul, suddenly true to itself, flung his vulgar passion to the winds. Bright's soul shed

the motor-van some mere, passing, senile obsession, and returned, exulting, to its old allegiance Bright's soul leaped to the box of the coach to pilot the runaways round the curve, while his blind and deserted body, mechanically 'carrying on', solemnly drove the van and the washing over the drop of the ten-foot bank . . .

\* \* \* \*

More luck than good management!' young Birkett quavered to an equally quaking friend. . . . ('Old Bright, wasn't it? Afraid he's done for? Why do these old women take to cars?') He stopped on the up grade and scolded a brace of men in a field near 'Blest if I know how the team managed that corner!' he admitted frankly, as they ran back 'Hanged if I didn't feel as if they were being handled by somebody else!'

\* \* \* \*

The blue roan whinnied in the stable . . .

## A COWARD FROM THE TOWN

ALL round the coast for miles runs the low sea-wall Out there, nearer the tide, are the broken pieces of a bigger bank Once it was fence to a thousand acres of new land, but after the sea had waited a while it took the new land back Sometimes they built a house on the lonely land. Once a young Squire built a house for his bride.

They came to it on a night of sweeping wind, roofed and oppressed by monstrous bales of cloud When they came to the marsh they had to walk, because the horses would not face the wind There was no road to the house, and they kept losing the little track on the green waste He was exhilarated by the storm, and sang, but she was town-bred and exhausted and afraid And because they had come too soon there was no light in the house and no fire and very little food Out at the mouth of the bay the waiting tide lashed at its chain

The town-bride was not really a coward, and she was not a fool She made a fire and served what food there was, and found a little oil and filled a lamp, while he roamed about and sang, and ran out into the waste and sang laughed and sang She heard him singing under her window when she went upstairs, a thin voice whisked away by the roaring wind So rough was the wind that it seemed to tear the dark when it came, yet when it was gone it left it solid behind But she had no time to sing or even to pray, because through the dark she was listening for the tide

It was she who heard it, too, when it came at last. Town-bred though she was, she knew it without fail, though he, after all his singing, was asleep. She knew when the bank gave and the flood came through, spreading and groping towards them in the night. And because she knew there was no escape, she did not disturb him but let him sleep. She let him sleep when the water reached the house, and swirled about the foundations and climbed the stair. She let him sleep when it swam into the room, and kissed her fingers hanging over the bed. It rose to the pillow, but she let him sleep .

The town-bride was not really a coward .

189830

## THE LAST CHAIR

THE cottage was quite empty but for the sun. From the bedroom had gone the old bed, the shining press, the dim mirror, the photograph of the child, from the kitchen the pots and pans, the patchwork cushions and the sofa with the propped leg. The whole house was newly-scrubbed,—clean walls and dry boards, and the windows were set open to the air. The cottage was quite empty but for the sun.

Almost empty,—not quite. In the kitchen there was just one chair, wooden and clean-scrubbed, like the boards, and on it an old woman, very still. Her old hands were crossed, her old face was set. The lines in it never changed, nor the dogged look in her eyes. There she sat, alone, on the last chair.

The silver chatter of the river ran below the house, under the bank that was all moss and crinkly fern. She had heard it so long that she did not hear it with her ears, but only and always with her heart. The bedroom smelt of the roses over the sill, the kitchen of the lavender by the door, but for her the house was sweet with memories, that was all. She was all memories herself, as she sat on the last chair.

A man came to the door and spoke, and his shape was black in the yellow square of sun. He had taken the household gear to their new home, and now he was ready to go, too. Bit by bit he had taken it away, but he had not taken the last chair. Every time he came back he said the same thing ‘Ellen, I’m going,’ he said, and

waited by the door; and then, after a while—  
‘Ellen, I’m going,’ he said again. And all the  
while she sat on the last chair

Strange that four walls can hold a whole life!  
Strange how fiercely the heart takes root. There  
was a home made ready for her elsewhere,  
among the things that she loved and knew  
What was she clinging to, in that little cot?  
What was it that would never come, too?

Long-ago love—a child’s cry—voices in the  
night. Steps on the stairs, work, and many tears  
The breath of morn, when the rime was on the  
bank, the breath of eve, when the rain was on  
the briar. The kitchen hearth . . . kisses and  
pain and death . . . the daily food . . . the daily  
growth of a soul

‘Ellen, I’m going,’ the shadow said again, and  
moved a little, letting in the sun

She stood up then, her hands hanging at her  
sides, and waited until he had taken the last  
chair. She looked round once—lifted her eyes  
to the stair, then she followed him out.

Now the cottage was quite empty, but for the  
sun

Almost empty, not quite



THE  
WISDOM OF THE SIMPLE



## THE LAST OF THE YEOMEN

I worried in my mind about Billy Braithwaite

Billy and his aunt live at Todshole, that dear old place down by the river, with its carved dates and its ivy and its mullioned windows with glass that always looks like black velvet. There are yew trees near it, of course, just where the cattle can lean over comfortably to eat them, and others again in the fields themselves. People ask Miss Braithwaite sometimes why she doesn't get rid of those yews, and she just lays them on their backs with one of her firm looks.

'Seemingly things as was good enough for my fore-elders is good enough for me,' she explains—if you are worth explaining to. 'We've got to loss *some* of our stock, haven't we, one way or t'other, or we shouldn't be human? If it wasn't t'yew, it'd be pleuro-pewmonia, or gripes, or tummellin' in t'beck, wouldn't it? Seems to me it's more respectable to get finished off by stuff

grows on your own ground than by coming across summat unexpected-like in Mr Pye's cake!'

So there the trees stay, and when Billy whitewashes the front of the house (yes, even the mullions, though that isn't his fault, but somebody's whom you can't get at to tell them about it) the yews look dead black against the whitewash and the windows, just as the windows look live black against the yews. And out in the fields they look as black as gallows-trees, especially when those roan cows that have too

much white about them (and *especially* the all-white one with a black nose which Miss Braithwaite pretends is a special breed of her own because she hadn't the heart to part with it when it was little) lie down under or near them, out of vanity, I sometimes think, but, perhaps, merely so that they can just 'reach to' and take a nibble when the burden of being a cow (and the wrong sort at that) weighs upon them too heavily

Miss Braithwaite is one of the Last of the Yeomen, for the yeomen keep on being last-er and last-er, in spite of everybody having tried to bury them off anything up to a hundred years ago. And now the New Yeoman has begun to get his teeth into things, and is just as much a yeoman, from the legal point of view, as the old one, in spite of his motor-car and his milk selling and his Trilby hat, and his lads getting as much 'edication' as his pedigree cattle, so the people who like climbing on to platforms and singing sentimentally about the last of the yeomen won't have even a pretence of a leg to stand on (unless it's Miss Braithwaite's leg) after a while

Miss Braithwaite isn't the motor-car sort of yeoman, naturally. She won't have one of them—motor or man—near the place. She sells her milk to the people round in the old-fashioned way, through Billy and a tap, and of course she hasn't such a thing as a separator. She can't keep her pedigrees straight, as I said before, because of her heart, and all Billy's 'edication' is just what was 'larned him' at the village school. And when she goes to market, in her black stuff gown and her poke bonnet and the

old shandrydan with the thirty year old Clyd - dale—why, if she was to run across an American millionaire, he would insist upon carting the whole outfit across the Atlantic right off! It simply wouldn't occur to him that Miss Braithwaite and the Clydesdale could be really *alive*

Billy is Miss Braithwaite's adored nephew, whom she has brought up from a baby, but he is also her farm servant, and she takes care to let him know it. No Pauline nonsense as to woman being the weaker vessel about Mi Braithwaite! I called one day at dinner-time—an abominable thing to do, but I *had* to get away from the curate—and found Miss Braithwaite eating half a deliciously-cooked chicken in the front kitchen, while Billy ate the other half in the back. Miss Braithwaite gave me one of her firm looks when I commented on it—having been upset by the curate—without stopping to think. She said, 'Miss—(whatever my name is)—I haven't yet sunk to sitting down to y meals with my hired man!'

But I haven't told you why I am worried about Billy. It isn't the chicken. He wouldn't mind that. His aunt cooks like the very Chef of Heaven, and that's all Billy cares about. What I mean is something that happened yesterday.

I was in the shippon with Billy just when the cows were coming in to be milked, and I was trying to tell him about the seating trouble in the Parish Church. The new Vicar wants to take all the seats away from everybody and give them back to everybody again—that is, he wants the all to be free, so that the congregation can

play a sort of General Post every Sunday and make things livelier generally. But the parishioners won't have it. They don't want to be lively. They want to sit where they have always sat, and where their ancestors sat, and, even if they don't feel up to going to church in the flesh, they like to feel that they are there in the spirit, and they don't want Mr. Nobody from Nowhere sitting heavily on that spirit. I told Billy what old Farmer Barnes of Bankside said when the trouble was put before him. 'Let 'e alane, and they'll all gang to their ain booses!' and Billy said, 'That's it! That's right!' without even a smile, watching each of his cows turning in at the door as if it was his lady-love coming up the lonning. He didn't think it was at all funny that either cows or folks should go straight to their own 'booses'. He had seen cows, at least, doing it all his life, and folk, he always says, are more like cows, if possible, than cows are like folk. They were doing it at this very

oment, two of them to a stall, and, if one of them, idly chewing the cud of remembrance about something or other, got on to the wrong side of the situation by accident, she pretty soon got herself butted out again. I remember once seeing the stock come back to a shippon in which the old gallows erection of woodwork had gone rotten, and stone stalls had been put in instead. The cows had been milked in the open for months, and the place must have seemed about as strange to them as the Carlton Hotel, but they never made a mistake. They didn't even hesitate. They just marched in and took up their own hundred or so cubic feet of space

in exactly the same latitude and longitude to which they had been accustomed

But still that isn't why I am worried about Billy

Billy is forty, at least, and he hasn't a wife. He never will have one, as far as anybody can see, because, as far as anybody can see, he will always have Miss Braithwaite. As I said before, I believe Miss Braithwaite will go on being the L t of the Yeomen until this new contingent also has hunted and danced and drunk itself into its grave. It's a pity, not about Miss Braithwaite, but about Billy's wife, she's missing something. Not that Billy himself minds about it any more than about the chicken. 'Nay, what should I want to be gettin' wed for?' he says, when it's mentioned. 'I've lived wi' my aunt forty year, and she's niver burnt a bit o' pie-crust yet!'

Billy, however, weighs on my mind in this matter, and yesterday I tried to push him off it. I said, firmly and imperatively, in the way his aunt has trained him to

'You'll be getting wed one of these days, won't you, Mr. Braithwaite?'

Billy gave the tail of the last cow a thoughtful twist, as if it were the starting-handle of the milking machine some brave soul comes annually to try to sell to Miss Braithwaite

'Nay, I doan't knaa as I shall,' he said musingly ('Git oop witha, Dandelion!') Then he brightened and looked coy. 'Though if I doan't, tha knaas, it wain't be fur want o' being exed!'

'Really?' I demanded breathlessly. 'You've

been—been—had your hand requested in marriage?"

He looked coyer than ever .

"That's about the size of it, I reckon—ay, yon's the ticket! Mary Dobson, now, she says to me, "Time you was gittin' wed, isn't it, Mr Braithet?" That's exin', isn't it? And Sally Wilson—"Why, Mr Braithet, baint you niver goin' to git wed?" That's exin', isn't it? Ay, and there was Jinny Black ,

I went away hurriedly to look at the calv  
You see what's worrying me *A I on the list?*

## TOMMY THOMPSON'S CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

TOMMY THOMPSON is one of the people who have taught me a lot about human nature—our sort of nature, that is, the kind we keep up here among the fells. Not but what I am always puzzled as to how he can possibly know anything about it, seeing that he so seldom encounters any of it except what comes cropping up in his old mother. They live at the top of a dale, poked away under a crag, where, if you are lucky, you may see the young foxes playing in the early morning, but where you so rarely happen upon anything in human form that, if you come across Tommy Thompson when you are not expecting him, it takes you at least a minute to decide that he isn't a sheep.

But then a great deal of human nature *does* crop up in his old mother—one has to admit that Tommy, in fact, says that you have only so much as to crook your little finger, so to speak, and up it comes cropping so fast that you can't stop it. She is certainly very firm with Tommy, firmer even than Billy Braithwaite's aunt is with Billy. Miss Braithwaite, after all, is only firm with her face and her tongue, whereas Tommy Thompson's old mother doesn't make any bones about being firm with a *big* stick.

I must say, from what he tells me, that there seem to have been times when I should have been firm with him myself, but of course I

shouldn't dream of letting him know it All I say in return is that he appears to have had a very hard life, borne by him as only the very front rank of heroes would even think of bearing it He likes that In fact, he likes it so much that he tells me all the saddest tales of his history every time we meet, and especially that dreadfully sad tale about his Christmas shopping

Tommy Thompson hasn't much use for Christmas, anyway, as you quickly gather He says he simply can't make out why people make such a stir about it, as if it was something as wonderful as a dead donkey Everybody fair worked to death, says Tommy, post-lads walked off their legs, shop-folks bustin' theirsels to get customers sarra'd, and even a quiet honest body like himself fashed until he is almost nicked i' t'heead, let alone being made the laughing-stock of the whole countryside

'It was that year as Kersmas come of a Setterda,' he begins impressively, 'an' market-day was o' Thorsday—a donky, duzzlin', clashy sort of a day an' all—an' I set off to Kendal wi' t'aald mare an' t'aald cart, like as I'se done i' every market-day sin I can think on'

His old mother came tearing out, just as he thought he had got safely away, and fetched him back again

'I'se clean furgitten as it's Kersmas o' Setterda,' says she 'Thoo mun get me a twa-three things i' Kendal Hofe a bag o' flour, to start wi'—thy Aunt Mattinson'll likely gi' us a look in, and Mister Robison, an' mappen passon, an' I un have summat bakt fur 'e An' so e cannles—we'se gettin' short—an' a twa-three

yard o' blew ribband fur tying up t'parlour  
curt . . . What sort o' blew ribband, saysta?  
Why, *blew* ribband, thoo gert daft! There's  
nobbut *ya* sort o' blew ribband! An' thoo can  
get a couple o' pund o' sossingers, an' some  
soap, an' a pair o' good black stockin's fur  
*mysen*—I'se nigh barfut, I'se sure!—an' a pair  
o' boots fur *thysen*, an' see tullt as they don't  
squeak, for t'last pair as thoo gitten mak' me  
far shammed to walk up t'aisle wi' tha of a  
Sunda'

'Hoo's I to knaa?' says Tommy 'They niver  
squeakt i' t'shop'

'Thoo *mun* knaa,' says Tommy's old mother,  
'or happen I'se larn tha, my lad!' And so that  
was that

Well, she let him off at last, and he says he  
never had such a ride in his life! First of all,  
he drove past Turner Green, out pops Mrs  
Mason

'Eh, Tommy lad, our Lairy s ganged, an' I'se  
clean furgitten as we mun have a twa-three  
pund apples fur Kersmas Day! If thoo'll nobbut  
fetch them, I'll niver furgit it on tha'

Then it was the parson's missis, scuttin' down  
the garden as if the dobbies were after her, and  
waving a dish-clout round her head

'It's Christmas Day on Saturday,' says she,  
'and we've no plum-pudding!' It'll never be  
Christmas without a plum-pudding, now will  
it? I hardly like to ask you, Mr Thompson,  
but you're always so kind——?"

And after that, Tommy says, there were half  
a score more on the same tack, so that before he  
got out of the dale he was fair mairsel, wondering

which of them wanted stockings and candles, and which of them wanted soap and plum-puddings

'Well, they mun just tak' their chanst!' he said to himself, at last, desperate-like 'I'se buy all t'things as isn't clean gone oot o' my head, an' then when I'se gitten back, they mun soart 'em fur theysens'

At Dale End he was stopped by Sammy Sampson's little lass, Betty, who ran out and held up her hand, and then stood first on one leg and then on the other, and looked down and said nothing

'Why,' says Tommy at last, after he'd waited a bit, 'thoo's a sight for sore eyes, my lile lass, any day o' t'week, but it's a bit donky settin' here lookin't at tha, aw t'same Thoo wants nowt i' Kendal, I reckon?'

'Ay, but I does!' she says then, suddenly plucking up spirit, and standing on both legs together, by way of a change 'Mother promisht me a lile doll fur Kersmas, an' father's ganged to market an' she's furgitten to tell him, so if *thoo* waint see an' fetch it, I'se happen not git doll at all!'

So Tommy promised to fetch the doll as well as all the other things that he'd been asked for, and, by the time he got to Kendal, danged if the doll wasn't the only thing he could remember out of the lot!

However, he made up his mind that he wasn't going to bother about them, he says 'Mappen t'others'll come back to me after a bit,' he told himself comfortingly 'I'se not fash mysen about 'em *yit*, anyhow'

The weather was so bad in Kendal that he felt bound to go and have a glass, first of all, and then, when he was through with his market-ing, he was bound to have another, for luck. After that, he was just beginning to think that he'd better be setting about executing his various orders when he saw it was twelve o'clock, and time for his 'lile snack.'

'Mappen they'll come back after I'se gotten summat to eat,' he assured himself 'I'se not furgitten *doll*, anyhow'

Well, he had his dinner, and another pint of ale along with it, and then he went out, looking in the shop-windows for all the things that had escaped his memory. But it was no use. Hunt as he might, he could see nothing that anybody had asked for except the doll, and there must have been a score of other things, sure and certain.

He says he was gaping in at Smith's, the jeweller's, and fair maddelt with thinking, when Long Jim Bateman came along.

'Whatsta latin' i' there?' says Jim, 'lookin' at finger-rings an' sic-like? Ista gaan to git wed?'

'Not as I knaas on,' says Tommy, 'though there's no tellin' when it'll be on tha, same as t'passon says o' the Judgment. Weddin's is like buryin's—no matter when they come, thoo's sartin sure to be fair gloppened by 'em. But I'se not bodderin' about that now. I'se gotten a lock o' trantlements to buy fur half Sleddle, an' I'se danged if I can think o' more nor yan on 'em!'

Long Jim told him never to mind, and said he'd likely remember them after a bit. He also

suggested a pint of ale. Drink was a powerful stimulant to the intellect, he reminded him cheerfully, and there was also the other little fact that it happened to be Christmas.

Well, Tommy says he thought it was no use slinking about the shops, for all the world as if he was a pickpocket or a tramp, so he went with Jim into the *Green Dragon*, and there he found a lot of pals who all said it was Christmas, too, and that he must have a pint with every one of them. He couldn't say no, of course, he always pauses to tell me here. That wouldn't have shown a nice spirit at all.

Between every pint he had a rare good think about all the things that had gone missing from his mind, waiting for his intellect to wake up and show a leg, but without result. No matter how he tried, the doll was the only thing that would have anything to do with him.

'Hasta thowt on?' Jim would ask him, from time to time. 'Nay?' Well, don't fash thasel ower mich. They'll happen lowp on tha sudden-like after thy next lile sup.'

But, in spite of Jim's hopefulness, Tommy says, nothing lowped on him at all—nothing, that is, except the floor when at last he stood up to go. He was that moidered and boddered, he says, with the strain on his poor brain, that he could hardly find his way out of the *Dragon* door.

'I'd best come wi' tha,' says Jim, who was right as rain, not being worried with having to think on for half the women in Sleddle. 'Happen I can help tha a lile bit.' Likely it's tape,' says he, after a deal o' scratching his head. 'Women use a parlish lock o' tape. Or pi?'

Our house is fair crowded out wi' pins . . . I  
can't think o' nowt else It mun be yan on 'em,  
surely!

They went up the street together, arm in arm, Jim offering' him all the things they saw as they went along—scrubbing-brushes and table-cloths and women's bonnets, even to the motor-car that all but ran over them at the top. But it was none of them, as Tommy said

They got to the toy shop at last, and there they found scores of dolls—'sic a scrowe', Tommy says, as you never saw, 'lass dolls and lad dolls, and Member of Parliament dolls as wasn't neither—all mak's an' sizes.' They pressed their noses against the pane, and gaped at first one and then another of them. 'I can't think o' nowt but doll fur Sammy Sampson's lile Betty,' Tommy says helplessly, 'an' what's to be done fur t'rest on 'em is more nor I ken'

Long Jim took his nose from the glass and propped himself up against a passer-by, who, after addressing some remark to him that didn't sound in the very least like a Christmas greeting pushed him off rudely on to Tommy

'Why, looksta here!' Jim said brightly, after he had given all the right answers to the passer-by. 'I'se gitten an idea. They're all wimmen

thoo's latin' things fur, and they've happen all gitten barns, more nor less. S'pose thoo tak's a doll fur ivery yan on 'em? They'll be that set up as thoo's thowt on 'em, they'll niver fash about t'other things as thoo's gone an' furgitten'

Tommy was rarely pleased with that, he says—more pleased than he'd been for a month of Sundays

'That's a reet good idea' he says, cheering up grandly 'Thank tha kindly, Jimmy! How dosta buy dolls, dosta knaa? By t'pund, likely?'

Jim said no, he didn't think you bought them by the pound, but by the bushel, so they went into the shop, and Tommy asked for half a bushel of dolls, but seemingly that wasn't right, either. However, in the end he got half a score of the gradeliest dolls you ever saw, and was as pleased as punch with them. Of course he didn't let wit what he wanted them for, he always tells me cunningly. The lass behind the counter thought they were for a Christmas Tree!

By the time the dolls had been happed up, he began to think he had better be getting back, so, after thanking Jim over and over again for being such a help to him, he found the old mare and cart and set off homewards. He was still very cocked up about getting out of his difficulties so nicely—so cocked up, indeed, that he actually found himself singing. At least, he *says* it was singing—and rare bonny songs, too, like 'Annie Laurie,' and 'If I should sow a tiny turmut-seed,' and such-like—though the folks that he met on the road seemed to think it was something quite different. But, by the time that he got to the point where you leave the highway for the dale, he began to summer down a little, and to remember all the folks who were waiting for their Christmas gear from Kendal.

There was his own old mother, to begin with, who had no barn but himself, and Mrs Mattinson, who had never had one of any sort, even the sort that was Tommy Thompson. There

was the parson's missis, who was seventy odd, if she was a day, and Larry Turner's wife, had only been wed a couple o' month come Tuesday Then there was Bob Thompson's wife, as was that mean she would bare give the childer bite and sup and their waarda clothes, and Janie Wilson, as had never got wed at all, and wasn't likely to, even if she went courting without a lantern

'My sarvis!' Tommy says to himself, going cold all over 'I'se not so sure but I'se made a bonny mess o' this' And went colder and colder

When he got to Dale End he found little Betty waiting for him in the rain, and staring the eyes out of hei head trying to see what he'd got in the cart behind him In fact, she was so busy wondering whether he had obeyed her behest, or whether he was like father—who not only instantly forgot everything that he was asked, but who often only came home on market-day at all because the mare wanted to come, and happened to bring him along with her—that she nearly got herself run over by way of a Christmas-box Tommy picked her out the gradeliest doll of the lot—not a Member of Parliament one, he says—and she was so enchanted that she climbed up on to the wheel and gave him a kiss that you could hear from there to Selside

After that he left dolls right and left up the dale, poking them in at people's doors and then getting away as hurriedly as possible He always was backward in coming forward, he says, at this point, looking coy, and never could under-

stand why folks wanted to be thanked for doing other folks a good turn'

He got home at long last, and his old mother came toddling out as soon as he rumbled into the yard

'Wheer's t'cannles?' says she, crammelling up and down the cart bottom 'An' seap? An' ribband? An' aw t'other things as thoo was tellt to git i' Kendal?'

A great light broke upon Tommy Thompson, so great a light, indeed, that he nearly fell down flat under it

'Goy!' he said, pushing his cap to the back of his head in order to allow the light to penetrate still further 'I have it noo!' 'Cannles an' seap an' stockin's an' sossingers—'

'Mappen thoo'll tell me wheer thoo's gitten this'n, then, as thoo's so lish wi' thy tongue?' says his old mother, very quiet-like, and holdin up the last doll by one leg

(Now, as Tommy always says, when he gets to this 'What would *thoo* have said?')

'It's summat as I'se brought tha fur Kersmas, aald lass!' he got out at last, as gallant as might be in the circumstances

I'd better not tell you what his old mother said . According to her unfortunate son, it was all the parson's sermons that she'd ever heard of rolled into one, with a lot of the Co - mination Service and the minor prophets thrown in, and when she did hold her whisht, it was not because she was liking Tommy any better, but merely because she hadn't the breath to carry her any further

Tommy says he didn't get any sleep that night

TOMMY THOMPSON' CHRISTMAS SHOPPING 73

at all, he seemed to be shopping for all Sleddle from dark to milking-time. And he spent Christmas Day on the top of Buckbarrow, with a collop of bacon for his Christmas dinner, waiting until all the folks who had been given dolls had had time to simmer down.

He says he didn't care, however. Betty kissed him.

## TOMMY THOMPSON AND CO.— ELECTION ARTISTS

TOMMY THOMPSON finds his old mother a bit of a trial, as I have said elsewhere, but there are certain occasions when she is also rather an asset. Even Tommy admits that she isn't always merely an ancient drawback. Sometimes, indeed, he is quite enthusiastic about her, so enthusiastic, in fact, that you can't always be quite sure whether it is his mother of whom he is speaking, or somebody else. 'It's a terble fine thing to have an old body about t'spot as can tell tha what's what,' he says, when he is feeling like this,—'time o' day, for instance, and which way t'wind blows, an' sic-like. I'd not be doin' wi'out my good old mother, not I, no more nor wi'out cracky old grandad clock, nor t'wedder-cock wi' t'blossen neb!'

One of the occasions upon which he saw his mother a bit differently—in another coat of paint, so to speak,—was a certain General Election. Folks in Westmorland always take a General Election as if it was something in the nature of a General Judgment, and this one was no exception. Everybody was as throng as could be, telling everybody else what they ought to do, and getting told it in return, while the agents were running about like so many rattans, cockering up folks who couldn't stand corn, shoving folks on to the register who ought to have been on it already, and hunting up other folks who had been dead for years, only they hadn't happened to hear of it.

Tommy Thompson's old mother, of course, was as throng as the rest, or, if anything, a good bit thronger, so, when she said to Tommy 'Vote for Bellingham'—just like that, much as you might 'say 'Put t'kettle on' or 'Sneck t'door' or any other little piece of kind instruction, he knew that he'd have to do it. However, he isn't one, as he says, for 'doin' owt in a scuffle, nobbut yance, that is, ya time as Miles Fishwick's old tup gi' ma Girsma Sports an' Cartmel Gallops down t'steepest side o' Buckbarter,'—so he didn't promise at once 'Vote for Bellingham, saysta?' he demanded, temporising 'Happen thoo'll tell me why?'

Tommy Thompson's old mother had no objection at all to telling him why, in fact, she could have gone on telling him why from then to Christmas 'Tell tha why?' says she, stirring the fire with the poker almost as pleasurable as if it had been Tommy 'If thoo'd nobbut much sense as a jammy-lang-neck, thoo'd ken why wi'out any telling. Thoo mun vote for Bellingham because he's the best-like man in t'county, an' the varra marra of thy own dad afore he gat lakin' about in t'bull-coppy. Thoo mun vote for Bellingham because he's gitten a missis as knaas a pund o' good butter when she sees it,—meanin' my own, as won fust prize at Kendal Show, an' mind thoo doesn't furgit it! An' last of all, thoo mun vote for him because he's manished to git two lasses wed i' ya year, which is more nor a deal o' folk can do, nowadays, when there isn't a man as yan'd touch wi' a pitchfork to owt less nor a square mile. Thee vote for Bellingham!'

'Mappen I will,' says Tommy, trying to look as though he had thought of it for himself, and after a bit he was that set on Beilingham coming out top, you might have thought that they were sweethearts, or happen twins. We're all like that in Westmorland, of course. We're a terble lon while in taking to an idea, but, once we've 'gitten hod', there's no getting us away from it. So when Tommy, poping about Kendal on the Saturday before the election, happened to run across snirping old Uncle Cragg o' Cockin, they had a threep and a fratch in the very middle of Finkle Street, with half the town looking on and holding their hats. Uncle Cragg was blue to the backbone (from an election point of view), and Tommy was yellow, and Uncle Cragg said it shamed him to the very heart to own a nephew who was the colour of a spade guinea.

'Why,' says he, 'I'd as lief be uncle to a mustard-plaster, danged if I wouldn't! If thoo votes yaller, I'll not leave tha as much as a cofe's head to marra thy own wi', so now I tell tha! Put that i' thy pipe an' smoke it, Mister Thompson o' Sleddle, an' think on as thoo looks sharp wi' thor blue heifers o' mine o' Wednesda' (Wednesday was election-day, and Tommy went to toe up the blue heifers that day in order to save a second journey) 'Why, sista, even t'heifers is blue!' says Uncle Cragg, laughing as if at the best joke since Genesis. 'All t'county's solid blue. Git away witha, thoo—thoo Buff Orpington!'

Well, Tommy wasn't best pleased with all this, as may be imagined, and when he got home that night he sat glowering in the ingle-

nook, and saying thing and nowt He w that bilin'-mad, he always tells me, with pride, that the kettle started singing with never a 'low'. As for his Uncle's heifers, he couldn't abide the sight of them, and when he pictured himself driving them up Kendal, Tommy all yellow, and the heifers all blue, he could have made the same sort of cussing-noise as a jibbing motor-bike.

On the night before the election he got one of the best blackings from his old mother that he'd ever had in the whole course of his existence

'Wheersta been slatterin'?' Tommy always quotes her as saying, and looking 'as teptious a wamp' 'Look at thy boots,—an' thy breech, —ay, an' thy jacket an' all! Ista that maiseft ower t'election thoo mun gang paddlin' about in t'yaller-wesh as was gitten fur t'dairy? A body o' thy sort should happen have a brain at either end to keep tha rightly out o' mischief Nay, it's no use to glump at *me*! If it wasn't for thy old mother, thoo'd like enough be paddlin' i' Jordan, an' wi' nowt to say fur thyself on t'other side, neyther! What's gitten tha, lad? Thoo looks fair nicked i' t'head!'

So then he told her, of course,—all about the way Uncle Cragg had behaved in Kendal, about the calf's head and the Buff Orpington, and the blue heifers that should have been yellow by rights, and at the end of it all his old mother upended herself, flyting like a bubbly-jock

'Mustard-plaster, saysta?' stormed his old mother 'Spade guinea? Calf's head, saysta? Buff Orpington? I'll larn Robbie Cragg to

call folks out o' their names! He yance swallered half a pund o' blue soap as a lad, an' he's mappen gitten a taste fur it ever sinice Thee come alang o' me, an' I'll larn tha as there's more use fur yaller-wesh nor just slatterin' aboot intilt But fust of all, thoo mun late thor heifers '

Well, Tommy fetched in the blue heifers, and he and his old mother together, they made a job of it . After he got to bed, he says, he laughed until the plaster tumbled off the ceiling and all but throttled him, and when the morning came, his old mother gave him a piece of yellow ribbon to put in his jacket, and trinned down to the gate-staup to watch him start for Kendal

'See thoo comes yam wi' no more to carry nor thysel',' says she, quite good-tempered-like, 'an' if thoo sees Bellingham, thoo can sarra him a clap on the back fia thy old mother Don't git giving folks any sauce, now, or owt like that, but thoo can tell Robbie Cragg, wi' my love, that he lees in his throat! An' mind thy better-mer clothes '

Tommy Thompson says he doesn't know how ever he got to Kendal at all, that day, let alone how he ever managed to get up Finkle Street From the attention he attracted, he says, he might have been a fire-engine or a Lord Mayor's Show, never just poor Tommy Thompson with a few young heifers However, he got to the market at last, to find it panged ham-sam with folk, half of them round Bellingham, who was in a yellow motor, and half of them round the other man, who was in a blue one Uncle Cragg was in the blue motor as well, and so pleased with himself that you wondered why something

didn't happen to him. And then, just when he was least expecting it, something *did* happen.

This is how Tommy Thompson always finish the tale

'Me an' t'heifers,' he says, 'come clinter-clantern' intilt market, skiftin' folks out o' the road until we was reet up agen Uncle Cragg's motor-wheels, an' thoo never heard sic a narration an' derdam in all thy born days! Folks looked an' gurned, an' shouted an' clapped, an' old Uncle sat down sudden-like wi' his mouth open, as if he'd taken boggle at summat. An' well he mud,' says Tommy Thompson, 'for t'heifers was bright as a button wi' yaller paint, wi' "Vote for Bellingham!" on ya side on 'em i' black, an' "Robbie Cragg o' Cockin" as large as life on t'other

'Uncle Cragg gat tull his feet agen when he seed yon last as if a string had fetched him

"Where's my blue heifers?" he spluttered, for all t'world as if he'd come ower sudden-like on a gert fish-bone. "Where's my blue heifers, thoo —thoo scratch o' grundsel?"

"Why, Uncle," says I, "I'se rarely ill-fashed, but there's no sic thing as a blue heifer in t'county! They're all solid yaller!" An' I ganged away an' panged in my vote'

Of course Tommy thinks it was the yellow heifers that put in Bellingham.

## AUTO-SUGGESTION IN BIBLE AND SHIPPON

I CALLED round the other day to see Mrs Bland of Birkrigg, but before I got to the house Jossie stopped me in the yard. Jossie is her husband, so the parish register says, but I'm about the only person in the world who addresses him as 'mister'. Mrs Bland says it's one of the straws which show who is the better horse. Anyhow, whenever you hear people talking about them, it is always 'Mrs Bland and Jossie'.

Jossie stopped me by throwing up his arms in front of me as if I had been a runaway cow, and then, pointing what you could not call anything but a hushed finger in the direction of the shippon, indicated that I was to follow him. Jossie is not dumb, any more than I am deaf, so I was at a loss to understand this farmyard pantomime. However, as he seemed to think a 'Hist ye!' cloak-and-dagger attitude suitable to the occasion (whatever that occasion might be), I bit my greeting in half and followed him silently.

Jossie has a small but very pure pedigree shorthorn herd of which he thinks more than of his hopes of Heaven, certainly more than he thinks of Mrs Bland, as Mrs Bland says herself. He once drove away in a hurry from a funeral, leaving her behind, simply because somebody told him a Hereford breeder was thinking of calling at Birkrigg that afternoon. Jossie has the same feeling about 'foreign' breeders looking at

his herd some Church of England parsons have about letting a Nonconformist help with the Service. It was awkward for Miss Bland, everybody she knew was either going another way or was crowded out, so that the only thing there was left for her to come home in was the hearse. Jossie was very sorry about it afterwards, of course, but he told her he could not guarantee that it would not occur again.

No ladies of the East were ever more jealously guarded than Jossie's darlings, as I knew. People said he could hardly sleep in the summer when they were out at nights, in the other half of the park that he shared with the squire (I knew their names, too, and their mothers' and grandmothers', not only what Jossie called them in the Herd-Book, but what he called them in the shippion. Of course, for the Herd-Book they had to have grand names like Birklegg Belvedere and Birklegg Belle, but Jossie said that at home the milk came easier-like for Sukey and Sally.) So when, finally, after sliding and stealing and tip-toeing from one end of the buildings to the other, we came to a stop in front of one of the calf-pens, I could hardly believe my eyes. Staring from Jossie's dramatically outstretched hand to the beautiful 'roaned' cow with her day-old calf, a pure white calf except for what looked for all the world like a neat little black saddle painted around its middle, I gasped out—'But—but—good gracious, Mr Bland, if it isn't a Friesian!'

Jossie ran his fingers slowly through his untidy grey hair, his faded blue eyes looking at the calf more in sorrow than in anger. 'That's it, miss,'

he agreed mournfully, 'you've gitten it reet off  
It's one o' they Freezy-uns all right, though I'm  
fair bet how it come about'

'I don't see how Sukey—I mean Birkigg  
Belvedere—*could*!' I floundered helplessly,  
watching the calf jogging about on unsteady  
legs, and not seeming to mind in the least that  
it had come into the world a semi-Friesian  
when it ought to have been a whole-time short-  
horn

'Nor me, neither, miss,' said Jossie, reaching  
out to pat the roaned cow with the pathetic  
gesture of a fond father to a fallen daughter,  
'not in any way as you'd call *reasonable*. There  
isn't a Freezy-un within fifty mile, barring yon  
cow Squire bought last year as a kind o' joke.  
Sometimes he'd make out as he'd gitten it to  
shame his shorthorns into milking better, and  
sometimes he'd say he wanted to see how it  
looked up agen the scenery. It used to make me  
fair sick to see her grazing along o' them grand  
beasts—not but what they bain't a patch on  
mine, and likely would ha' looked worse yet  
but for yon Hollander. I took care to keep a  
right good fence atween her and *my* pastur', I  
can tell you, but danged if Sukey there didn't  
take a fancy for her! Many a time I've seen  
'em chuckin' noses together across railing, but  
there's nowt about chuckin' nos as I know on  
could fetch yon calf'

I had a momentary vision of a buttercup land-  
scape blotched by a black and white saddled  
body, and inspiration came to me 'Auto-sug-  
gestion—that's what it!' I announced im-  
portantly

'Eh?' Jossie stared at me blankly 'Beg pardon, miss? I only partly what heaid'

Haltingly and idiotically, I began to explain to my audience of one what M' Coue had explained so efficiently to the whole world, and was just wondering why on earth I had started out to make such an ass of myself when Jossie impolitely but mercifully stopped me

'What, all that there's as old as old, now I come to think on'<sup>12</sup> he burst out 'I mind hearing o' yon suggestion stuff when I was a nipper at Sunday school'

It was my turn to be taken aback now, not only by Jossie's unexpected erudition, but by the sort of Sunday school he had evidently been privileged to attend. The miserable institution which it is my Sabbath-day business to control seemed by contrast puerile to imbecility

'Ay, I mind it right well,' Jossie continued thoughtfully, a reminiscent smile on his hitherto tragic face. For the first time he looked at the Friesian calf as if it wasn't a Friesian but only a calf. 'Jacob, it was Genesis. Same case as Sukey's here, or as near as makes no difference'

Seeing that I still showed no signs of even ordinary intelligence in the matter, he proceeded to give me the story in detail

'Jacob, you'll think on,' he informed me kindly, 'had never gitten any pay from Laban as his hired man, nobbut an odd an' end or so of a lass as I wouldn't ha' looked aside at myself. So when Laban axed him what he'd take for the half year, so to speak, he said he'd have all the young stock as come speckled and spotted.

(Jacob knew well enough there was nowt like a good roaned un' he broke off to chuckle 'Folks say they'd nowt but sheep and goats in them days, and not cows at all, but I don't hold wi' that myself Bible says they was cattle, anyhow, and Bible should ought to know ) "Reet!" says Laban, and they clapped hands on't, and likely wetted it as well, and then danged if Laban didn't make off wi' all t'speckled stuff to where Jacob couldn't get at it! So there was the poor lad left wi' nowt but plain uns to breed from, but he was too nottable to make a song about it He just took and peeled hazel-rods and the like and put 'em in t'drinking-troughs, and cows gitten that used to seeing things streaky-like when they come to drink, that their calves, when they come, come streaky an' all He framed that smart at manishing them at last that they was speckled uns every time, and when Laban come back he fund as t'poor lad as he'd tried to rob had nearabouts nabbed the herd!"

'What a wonderful memory you've got!' I exclaimed admiringly 'But I don't think it was quite nice of Jacob, all the same'

'Nay, what, we mun do what we can in this world,' Jossie told me reprovingly, 'there's nowt to see to us but ourselves Ay, I was always good at t'Book,' he admitted, his eyes twinkling, 'and, besides, I axed a sight o' questions about yon Teacher was fair fed up on 'em, I can tell you, afore I was through He would have it as some on 'em wasn't proper!'

'There's a deal o' haughty suggestion, though, in t'Book,' he returned presently to the subject,

when we had talked about the calf again for a while (He seemed to have grown almost proud of it by now "Tisn't everybody as'd have a thing lik'd that happen to them, is it, miss?"—though I don't say it wasn't a shock) There's Samson, for instance, wi' yon head of hair he was so stuck on—what, it was nobbut thinking about it as did that! (Here he looked at me as if wondering whether I hadn't happened to hear of Samson, either, and I nodded hastily to show that I had) 'I'd a nevvy myself as got it into his noddle he couldn't wrestle wi'out yon forelock farm-lads is so fond o' sporting I remember once t'barber taking it off him by accident day afore a big match, and he just ligged doon tull 'em all round, though he'd felled 'em all week before

'Then there's Nayman, as made sic a stir about washing hissel i' Jordan,' he went on glibly, 'and they beggars at yon dub as was called Silam Seems to me they was much the same folk as used to go to the Holy Well at Humphrey Head in my young days They just otter-suggestioned 'emsel's into thinking they was cured, though I don't say as there mightn't be summat a bit extry in t'watter as well

'As for that chap Gehazy, as made sure he'd gatten leprosy just because somebody tellt him he had, and Ananias and Sophia, as fell down dead out o' fright,—what, there's nowt fresh, I'm sure, about foolishness like yon! I'd an aunt of my own as woke up shouting out as she'd swallered her false teeth and was going to dee on't reet off T'folks in t'house was that flustered

wi' it all they never thought on to look anywhere except down her throat, and so dee she did, right enough, wi' teeth setting on t'dressing table and looking at 'em all the time.'

'Ay, and there's St John, as thought as you'd nobbut to keep on saying so and you'd get fond of anybody in a bit—meaning no offence, miss, either to him or you. It's a pity more folks don't 'gestion 'emselves into getting fond o' their neighbours. St John could ha' gitten fond of a pot egg, same as a hen, if he'd nobbut set his mind tull it, I'll swear!'

At this juncture I began to give an imitation of a lady on the point of departure, not being quite certain what Jossie might do with the New Testament now he had got to it. He was still thinking about St John and his pot egg, and only stared vaguely at the hand I offered him, but came to himself after a minute or two and shook it gingerly.

'You'll step in and have a cup o' tea wi' the missis?' he said politely. 'You've set me up wonderful about yon calf. I don't mind telling you I was fit to cut my throat over it afore you come, but now I'm that cocked up I think I'll have its photo took for the *Daily Sketch*!'

## STRICKLANDS

PERSONALLY, I think it was hard on poor Mattha Duckett. It always *is* rather hard on a man that his wife should so often be right about things in general by dint of that extra something-or-other with which Providence has seen fit to endow her (and which no man in his heart has ever really believed in yet), but when the event of her being right includes a coffin for himself and a beef-and-ham burying and arvel-bread and death-scarves and black gloves for the bearers (or would have included most of these things if it hadn't been war-time, or if Mattha had been his own grandfather), well, it seems to me harder still. And poor Mattha had no choice, as he said himself. He made a little song about having no choice when he began to be ill. This was the little song, and he made no end of a song about it

*Gaa agen t'Government, finish in quod!*  
*Gaa agen t'missis, finish in t'sod!*

His wife didn't like it, naturally, though the Government didn't care. Still, he hadn't much choice, had he? Not that he really believed in that extra something-or-other even then. He only pretended he did to get all the sympathy that was going.

It was war-time, as I said before, when we were all keeping pigs and poultry and Belgian hares, and bottling everything we could lay our hands on, from shanks of rhubarb to old he ; and the swords that the soldiers were not allowed

to take to France seemed really being turned into ploughshares up and down the country. Tractor-ploughs, too, tore the nap off the ground like a lot of enormous turkeys, looking about as much in place as the plesiosaurus. We put up with them, however, because the abnormal note which they struck linked them somehow with the battle zone. They would pass, we said to ourselves, as the war itself would presently pass. . It was far worse to see the horse-plough that knew better turning up old grassland that should never have been touched. It was like putting a priest to pull down the temple in which he had been ordained, like setting a sheepdog to slay his master's sacred sheep.

Still, it had to be done—at least, some people thought so who were in a position to think aloud—and so it *was* done, though by a good deal of pushing and pulling. Mattha Duckett was one of the folks who had to be pushed before anything happened, but when once you had pushed him you couldn't stop him. Nothing was stopping him that day I went up to Stricklands and beheld him ploughing the Kirk Mound—not even a voice from nowhere, that flowed as freely as Lupton Beck.

He was ploughing across the slope of the hill, with brown horses in front of him and a swirl of white gulls behind, and the blue of his kytle was hedge-sparrow's egg blue against the starling blue of the March sky. He said 'Ah—*wee!*' to the horses, as ploughmen have said more or less ever since we stopped using blue woad, and they slanted their ears back at him, and then pricked them up at the screaming gulls. When he

reached the top of the curve he loomed large against the sky—the World-Figure, the Eternal Ploughman . Then he dipped below the breast of the hill, and the wake of white gulls was left swirling and shrill behind

South of me I could see Stricklands, with a dwelling-house that would never have looked like a house at all if Nature hadn't happened to like the people who lived in it, and hammered and beaten and mossed it until it was part of herself One of Mattha's fore-elders had created it simply by going to a contractor and ordering a house so many feet long, high, and wide When it was finished they discovered that it was a couple of feet short, which annoyed the fore-elder The contractor, however, soon put that right He merely built on another two feet of wall at the gable end

I looked over the hedge, and the voice that was flowing like beck-water stopped as if stopped by a tap I saw a dreadful sight when I looked over the hedge Old Mrs Duckett was lying on the opposite wall in her frilled sun-bonnet and print gown, with her nose and her toes cocked to the sky, and her wrists and ankles tied with spare bits of Mattha's ploughing-cord

I ran round the field in order to intercept Mattha without crossing the furrows, but it was some time before I caught him No matter how hard or how slowly I ran, by the time I got to one end of the field he was always miraculously half way back to the other end of it again. When I did corner him at last he looked hugely surprised, staring at me out of his seamed face,

that looked so young at a distance, with his kind, patient, eternally young eyes

'Mattha,' I said, completely embarrassed when it came to it, but making a desperate effort to be tactful, 'Mr Duckett, that is—there's—there's something wrong with your wife'

He said 'Oh, ay?' looking placidly past me and straight ahead, precisely as if Mrs Duckett's cocked-up toes were not cutting a twenty-mile view in half

'She—er—seems a bit backset and foreset,' said I, fatuously

'Oh, ay?'

'Not to say—er—tied by the leg'

'Oh, ay?'

He pushed back his cap and scratched his head, smiling at me, while I gaped at him helplessly. Then instead of saying 'Oh, ay?' a fourth time, he said 'Ah—wee!' and there he was ploughing away up the field with his brown horses and his blue kytle and his swirling, screaming cloud of gulls

I went over to Mrs Duckett and fumbled diffidently with the cord, while she lay stiff as a poker and with her mouth shut like a box-lid. I helped her down from the wall and we walked to the house together in silence. It was not until we were snug over a cup of tea and some currant scones, and a cat or two, and some chickens in a basket, and a lamb that was 'a bit weakly-like,' all gathered together round the kitchen fire, that she unfolded to me the inner meaning of the occurrence

'Ye see, 'twas like this,' she said, giving one

of the cats a slap for showing too much interest in the chickens, opening the basket and saying 'Sweet, sweet!' in a voice that was suddenly as sweet as the word, and lending the lamb a finger to suck by way of temporary encouragement—'Mattha was in a terble tew when plooin'-ordeis come aboot yon meeder, but after a deal o' glumpin' an' sic-like he sattled doon tull it, as men do (Ay, and like enough swing roond t'other road, and be as set on't as a clocky hen!) But I didn't sattle tull it, not I Theer's a deal folks don't know, and my mother used to say as theer was always a epydemic o' some sort when old grassland was ploed oop I want nowt wi' epydemicks at *our* spot, as I tellt our master, so, as fast as he turned t'furrows, I turned 'em back He gitten that mad at last he took and fixed me on t'wall but I've t'reets on't, all t'seem Theer'll be a judgment o' some sort wi' all this maapment aboot grass-turning, as sewer as duck-eggs is duck-eggs!'

Well, judgment or no judgment, there was certainly influenza—that speedy and sinister sort with pneumonia attachments that hustled you heavenwards like a Handlev-Page And Mattha caught it, with all the attachments he could lay hands on and a bit over And died....

## SECOND WIND

THIS is the story of how old Jammie Weston, the Ewigg keeper, pushed not only a lesson of common-sense, but how to keep hold of a good job once you have got it, into a neighbouring land-agent. It happened not long before old Jammie retired from active service, and, instead of keepering, started a competition with old Mrs Duckett as to which of them could attend the greatest number of dances before they attended their own funerals. They began this amusement after old Jammie had lost his wife, and poor Mattha Duckett had died of ploughing during the War, and it kept them going wonderfully. Everybody recognised that it kept them going wonderfully, and was very kind about it. Seats were always reserved for them in 'bus or car, no matter which of the younger end might have to be left behind. 'What! Ye can walk, can't ye?' the latter were told firmly. 'What's wrong wi' your twa legs that they can't move wi'out a fiddle shoving 'em?' Business afore pleasure, tha knaas, and this here competition-stuff is serious business. I did hear as t'landlord o' t' "Blue Bell" wor makin' a book on't, and I wain't say but what I've got a tidy bit on old Jammie, myself!'

Neither of them danced, of course, not because they thought they were past it, but because of the risk of knocking themselves up and getting behind in the competition. But they both liked to be asked, and no dance earned the seal of their approval at which they were not invited.

to take the floor Those accustomed to them knew that they were safe in making this noble gesture, and derived the chief amusement of the evening from pushing the job on to horrified strangers who were not aware of it

This has nothing to do with the lesson to the land-agent, except to show that old Jammie had learned to hang on to things—even life itself—when they were leaving him According to Jammie, there comes a moment in every job when the person who holds it is tempted to down tools and be quit of it That moment arrives when the excitement of getting on terms with a fresh task is over, and the settling-down to what may be life-long responsibilities has begun Whatever the truth of the matter may be, that moment, anyhow, had come to young Hardisty

Of course, anybody who knew young Hardisty knew that he wasn't having any too easy a time of it, young Hardisty took care of that He had just obtained his first really important post, taking it on with that sense of having been entrusted with a mission which all land-agents feel who really love their work Naturally, he had looked for difficulties, but what bothered him was that the difficulties he had looked for were not the difficulties that arose It bothered him so much that he was rather inclined to make a song about it, and more particularly about his employer, much as Tommy Thompson makes a song about his autocratic old mother People were sorry for young Hardisty, just as they are sorry (or Tommy imagines they are) for Tommy, and rather encouraged him in his

singing It was all the more credit to Jammie that he managed to get the lesson home without hearing a single burst of song about the employer

Certainly, the latter was the sort that most people would have dispensed with, if they could, even if they did not desire, as young Hardisty sometimes sinfully desired, to put his head in a bucket and see that it stayed there He was a pendulum type of man, for ever swinging between two opinions, and expecting his agent to come cheerfully swinging after him Young Hardisty, being young, naturally had what he considered to be permanently-fixed ideas on almost every subject, and didn't want to swing, so it was all a bit of a strain Optimists told the poor young thing that he would get used to his employer, that he would even get fond of him, and that, given a certain expenditure of patience and time, he would become devoted to him But young Hardisty was so far from being able even to stand the sight of him that on this particular day he had made up his mind to send in his notice

He actually had the notice in his pocket as he climbed the moor to give a message to old Jammie—no doubt the fearfully-formal sort of notice that a very young man sends in who is badly hurt in his feelings It was just about the time old Jammie completed his fifty years on the moor—a span of service that young Hardisty used to say made him ache to think of He said he couldn't imagine himself staying anywhere on earth for fifty years at a stretch, and certainly not on the same piece of earth as his pendulum

employer I expect he thought of the old keeper's quiet face, that is lean and seamed like a piece of the moor itself, and his quiet eyes, that are like a piece of the pale sky over it, and decided that he must be made of very different stuff from old Jammie

.It was spring-time and mating-time when he went up, and all about him the grouse would be fussing to and fro, and giving their curious call, which sounds like 'Co' back! Co' back!' followed by a liquid chuckle From all sides the moor would send him its influences of sanity and peace, and even before he came to the last rise he would meet a fresh breeze from the sea His heart must have lifted in spite of him by the time the keeper's cottage came into view, nevertheless, old Jammie, with the intuition born of long years in lonely places, knew that there was something wrong, the moment he set eyes on him

"Thinkin' o' quittin'" he says he said to himself, as the young man came up, but he did not question him Instead, as soon as their business-talk was over, he set himself to amuse him, telling him tales of old times, and making him laugh more than once in spite of his depression

But, with that notice burning a hole in his pocket, young Hardisty was not likely to laugh long The subject was bound to come up again in his mind, and seek an outlet 'Did you never get sick of it all?' he asked old Jammie, presently 'Did you never want to clear out and try your hand at something else?'

I can see old Jammie looking away across the heather before he made his careful answer.

‘Ay I did—once,’ apparently he said at last, ‘and afore I’d been here as much eighteen month I was a bit above myself just then’—here he would pause to give his old man’s soundless laugh—‘and I thought as I wasn’t gettin’ enough consideration But, as I went down to give in my notice, I met an old cock-grouse, a-settin’ on a wall, and shoutin’ “Co’ back! Co’ back!” as if he was fit to bust “I’d give tha Co’ back!” says I, “if I’d gitten my gun!”—but he never budged “Co’ back! Co’ back!” says he, and I did as he said, and here I’ve been for nigh on fifty year’

‘And you’ve never regretted it?’ asked young Hardisty, after a pause

‘I’ve never regretted it      Seems to me,’ he went on, ‘as it’s summat like gettin’ your second wind If you get it, you likely last out the race If you don’t, you break      Seems to me, it’s best, if you can, to last it out’

Jammie says that there was a very long pause, after that, during which they looked together to where the sky brightened over the sea   Then, without a word, young Hardisty took a letter from his pocket, and tore it in pieces

That’s quite a long time ago now, and young Hardisty is still lasting out

## TRAIN UP A CHILD .

I HAPPENED to be in Witham last market-day, and I saw old Mrs Ellwood holding up half the town at a Belisha crossing. She must be at least eighty-five years old, if she is a day, and she has spent all her life at the end of some field-track or another, with nothing more exciting in the way of traffic than the cows coming in for milking. Yet she was facing the rush and roar of the modern town as if she had been born to it.

Witham used to be a sleepy old place, where people stood about in the street with their dogs at their heels, and only got out of the way when some carriage-and-pair came along and pushed them. Now, when the old lady stepped down from the pavement, there was a sort of cosmic convulsion. Buses and cars screeched as they drew up, motor-cyclists fell off their motorcycles, push-bikes and vans all but collided, and stopped, gasping. Somewhere in the midst of this present-day representation of the rolled-back Red Sea I saw a grinning policeman.

Mrs Ellwood took not the slightest notice of the various vehicles champing on either side of her. Clasping a stout bag under her arm, she minced slowly across the street, rather as if she were walking on stepping-stones, and might suddenly fall off them. The people whom she was holding up regarded her with mixed irritation and amusement, the latter being somewhat justified by her costume, which wouldn't have been quite a bonnet and mantle in the old days, and wasn't quite a hat and coat in these. A sort

of mule rig-out, so to speak. . . . Some of the onlookers giggled as she went by, and the policeman stopped grinning, and glared at them d - approvingly

She seemed to be making for Woolworth's, which was just opposite, so, as I wanted to go there, too, I scuttled after her 'What a nerve you have!' I exclaimed, when we had shaken hands 'How do you do it? I just shut my ey , and run'

She pretended at first that she didn't know what I was talking about, though a twinkle belied her

'They mortar-cars, d've mean?' she enquired at last, innocently 'What, there's nowt to that! You just make up your mind where you want to be at, and gang bullnecks for t'spot'

I shook my head

'It can't be as easy as all that,' I said, unbelievingly 'Or else half the people in England want their minds making up for them! Even then, I don't believe they would carry things off like you'

She continued to twinkle

'Ay, well, I don't say but what I've had more training than most!' she admitted presently, almost paralysing me with wonder as to how she could ever have become traffic-trained the lonely fells 'I'll tell you about it, sometime But I've my shopping to see to, now, so you'll kindly excuse me A nice job it'll be an' all,' she finished, with sudden scorn, 'wi' folks pushing and shoving at you like a lock o' bullocks!'

She made her way into the shop, while I

followed her at a discreet distance, and presently, like the indiscreet people outside, I, too, was giggling. There was no Belisha crossing about old Mrs Ellwood once she was inside Woolworth's. Not only was she always in the wrong stream of comers and goers, either running into them or standing stock still and letting them run into her, but she tried to buy things at the wrong counters, got mixed up with perambulators and dogs, and, when she wasn't dropping her bag or her change, dropped her umbrella or her parcels. I waited until she seemed to be getting tired of these somewhat wearing amusements, and then joined her as if by chance, and suggested refreshments.

'Now!' I said, when we were swinging our legs from high stools at the luncheon counter, with enough excellent food collected round us for a farm-labourer after a day's hay-making. 'Do tell me how you come to be so clever at crossings.'

Mrs Ellwood sniffed suspiciously at the cakes, took a sharp look at the sugar-basin, and whirled the tea round in the tea-pot before she answered.

'Well,' she began, prodding a piece of bun with her fork, and breaking off to say that pigs wouldn't have looked at it where she came from—'Ye see, it was like this. When I was a lile lass, and nobbut an only child, at that, t'chap as farmed t'next spot to us was a ter'ble bad neighbour. A ter'ble bad neighbour he was an' all, and my father couldn't abide him. He wasn't over-peaceable like himself, come to that, and he wouldn't stand uch in the way of

impudence Many's the time I've heard him say as he'd take his gun to t'chap if he had any more on't I mind quite well ganging to bed feared as I'd hear a shot in the night, and know yan o' t'daft critturs had finished off t'other'

She said all this in perfectly commonplace tones, just as if she were discussing the butter-prices of the moment Indeed, the butter-prices, being exceptionally low just then, would have caused her more excitement I said nothing, knowing that the pleasant aspect of many a farm did not correspond with the passions seething inside it Still, it did see rather odd, to be hearing such a tale in Woolworth's!

'I was an only child,' she went on, 'as I said before, and as there were no other barns anywheres about, I ganged to school by myself It was a fairish distance an' all, and I was no more set nor other folks as I know, on starting a mite too soon There was a right o' way, though, through yan of our neighbour's fields, and I used to nip across, and pray as he wouldn't see But he'd a nice surprise saved up for me I hadn't thought to expect One day, when I was late, and legging it like John Peel, I fund he'd put a bull in it'

'What a wicked shame!' I exclaimed indignantly, and so loudly that a waitress looked towards me as if feeling she ought to rebuke me 'Did you run away?'

Mrs Ellwood whirled the tea-pot once more, and re-filled both my cup and her own before replying 'Nay, what should I run away for?' she enquired placidly, when her mind had come back to me again 'There was school waiting

on me, wasn't there? They gev' childer t'stick in them days if they didn't do right, and I wasn't that stuck on getting it'

'You should have gone back and told your parents,' I suggested, still rather more excitedly than was compatible with the best Woolworth behaviour. But Mrs Ellwood only shook her head, without looking at me.

'What! And have my dad reaching for his gun afore you could say "Jack Robison" Nay, I couldn't do that There was nowt for it but to gang on, and make t'best on't . Not that I went on right away, I'll give you that,' she admitted honestly 'I stood looking at t'bull, and t'bull looked at me, and then, on t'far side o' t'wall, I saw t'farmer laughing at me

"Noo I'se gitten tha, my lile lass!" says he, gloating-like. "Thoo's Ted Thompson lass, bain't tha, and thoo's off to git laimed at school? Well, I'll larn tha a lesson as thoo wain't furgit in a month o' Sunda's If thoo walks streck acrost field, t'bull'll likely not touch tha I wain't *promish* tha he wain't, thoo'll think on, but likely he'll not But if thoo gits running backards and forrards, he'll be ester tha like a shot ""

'He ought to have been shot!' said I, fiercely  
'Weren't you terribly frightened?'

Mrs Ellwood thought about this for a minute or two, and then agreed rather cautiously that she was 'Leastways, my *legs* was fricken,' she said, 'as they wouldn't stop tremblin' But whether I was more flate o' t'man or t'bull I couldn't ha' tellt you Likely I wasn't as feared o' t'bull a town-lass mud ha' been, but I

knew enough about 'em to know as you couldn't fool 'em And I *did* know as t'man as owned it was a devil, and worse nor any 'bull, and that, if I didn't do as he said, he'd likely finish me

'Well, as I said, t'bull an' me glowped at each other, while t'chap stood girning, and then, very slowly-like, I started walking Leastways, I reckon I was doing summat o' t'sooart, though my legs didn't feel like it Anyway, I gat to t'other side in the end, and, my word, didn't I just hop it yance I was in t'road!'

'But surely you told the teacher?' I enquired  
'Or the police, or somebody? You didn't just let him get away with it?'

Mrs Ellwood did look at me then, and almost pityingly The contempt of the dweller in wild places for his softer and more protected fellow showed for a moment in her eyes

'Where d'ye think I'd ha' fund polis in yon lone spot?' she demanded scathingly—'even if I'd gitten t'pluck to up and speak tull 'em! As for t'teacher, she was ower throng to be bothered wi' such-like rubbish Besides, as I tellt you, it would all ha' come back to my dad I was put about, though,' she added pensively, after a pause, 'to finnd I'd t'same job to do on my road back'

'Don't say the bull was still there!' I squeaked, horrified

'Ay T'same bull, and t'same man, and t'same lile lass dodderin' acrost field What's more, I gitten it to do for several days . Yon old devil was right about t'bull, too If I walked quiet-like, it would nobbut stand and stare, but if yance I started to run, it'd come roaring after

me. T'chap'd laugh hissel' sick on t'far side o' t'farmyard wall "Thee git on wi' it!" he'd holler "I'll larn tha, if I can't larn Ted Thompson!" He did larn me an' all By t'time I was through, I cared no more for t'bull than I did for t'yett-posst'

"So that's why you care nothing for Belisha crossings, either!" said I, as we gathered up our parcels "Thank you for telling me I can't *really* believe, though, that he would have let it hurt you Perhaps he knew it was quiet, all the time'

"Well," said Mrs Ellwood, as we fought our way down the shop, and prepared to plunge into the street—"there's quiet and quiet It killed its owner, t'next week ,"



# STORIES OF MARRIAGE



## THE AUNT SALLY

IT seemed as if he would never get home . . . He had been an unusually long time coming over the pass,—so long, indeed, that already the dusk was falling. Already the mountains in front of him had faded. A film had come over the lake. On every side of him the gates of the valley were closing for the night.

But even the sight of the shadows creeping along the plain beneath him had failed to hurry him. His pony, recognising its own dale even before its vague contours were visible from the heights, had chafed at the rein as it pushed forward down the winding track. But the soul in him had refused to push forward. He had held himself back as he held the pony back. While his body was carried downwards towards the valley to which he belonged, his mind remained obstinately fixed in the valley lying behind him.

He had had such a grand day, over there . . . The Shepherds' Meeting in Hawesdale was always a great 'do', but this year it had been better than ever. There had been a fox-hunt, to begin with, followed by the sorting of the sheep that had wandered from their heafs, and after an immense meal there had been sports and sheep-dog trials. He had had to leave the latter, though, before they were through, grumbling to all and sundry about the necessity. He had told everybody that he had to be getting back because he had stock to see to, but what he really had to be getting back to was his wife Cattie.

He had forgotten Cattie during the day, busy as he was with that sudden rushing busyness that comes every now and then in the rhythmical life of the dales. It seemed natural to forget her,—over there. Most of the people he met had known him before he was married, and found it easier than not to think of him as still unwed. He had found it easy to think it of himself, too, joyfully slipping back in their company to his boyhood days. He had laughed and joked as of old, and talked—especially talked—as if bent upon making up for all those hours at home when he gritted his teeth on his tongue and said nothing.

It was the innkeeper's wife who had reminded him of his own, and that just when he was at his happiest and freest. 'And how's Mrs Ewbank, these days?' she had asked, interested as the daleswoman always is in her neighbours, even when she is separated from them by the solid bulk of a mountain. 'Not so well, isn't she? Eh, now, that's a sad pity! Likely she finds it dull at your spot after what she's been used to . . .' and he had been forced to remember Cattie. Bitterly resenting the interference, yet unable to refrain from acting upon it, he had saddled his pony and started angrily and reluctantly on his homeward journey.

Dropping down the last of the fell, he came to the stream that bordered the dale, and across which, no more than two or three hundred yards away, he could see the shepherd's cottage that was his dwelling. It had a curiously uninhabited look, he thought, regarding it grimly through the gloom, with no smoke going up

from the chimney and nobody stirring about the door. But then Cattie, who hated the place, had always had the knack of making it seem as though nobody lived in it. That was a curious thing, when you came to think of it, seeing how highly coloured she was and shrill,—a thin, red-cheeked, flaunting type of woman, with a high, penetrating voice.

His pace had slackened continually as he approached the bridge that led across the beck to his home, and now he drew rein altogether. The reluctance that had held him back on the hills swelled now into a fierce distaste. Empty though the house seemed, he knew quite well that it was nothing of the sort. Cattie would be waiting for him inside,—waiting for him, yet not glad to see him, and full of snarled complaints. The pleasure of the day would be paid for and overpaid by the time he went to bed, and suddenly he felt that he could not face that payment. There came upon him, indeed, an almost physical horror of the bridge that led from the happiness he had just left to the bitterness lying before, a horror that was like an actual barrier preventing him from crossing it. He sat for a moment or two swearing to himself as he stared across at the cottage, and then, slipping from his saddle, turned the pony loose, and flung himself to the ground.

He said to himself, half-sitting and half-lying, his fingers scraping among the loose stones on the fellside, that he would not enter the house that night. He knew so well what it would be like,—the dirty kitchen and larder, the frowsty bedroom, the general air of confusion and

desolation produced by its careless mistress As he went in he would see Cattie's red checks flaring at him through the gloom, those curiously red cheeks that always looked as though they were painted They were not painted, as he knew, from the days when he had cared enough to put his own against them, but they looked like it, nevertheless He had sometimes found himself wishing that they actually *were* painted, so that, one of these days, when the paint happened to be rubbed off, he might possibly find a human being underneath

For he had never found it yet In all the years that he had spent with Cattie she had never seemed to him quite a real woman There were times when he felt that not only had she paint on her cheeks but in her veins, so little was there in her to which it seemed possible to appeal There was no spring of tenderness or humanity in her, as far as he could tell, no more than could be expected or discovered in a brightly coloured doll

Raising himself a little, he flung a stone idly in the direction of the beck They had had heavy rains lately, and the water was still out The grey streak of the stream flowed away on either hand until it was lost in the greyer dusk Behind him the pony pulled raspingly at the strong fellside grass, munching contentedly in spite of its bridle His dog, as tired as himself after the excitements of the day, lay with its head on its paws and shut lids set on the lightest of light springs

He flung a second stone at an old tree-trunk half-submerged both by the water and by the

shadow of the bridge, watching the grey curve of the missile it swung upward and then down until it reached its objective. Miserable as he was, he was yet able to feel a thrill of pride in the correctness of his aim. He had always had a sure eye and a steady hand, and could still take pleasure in them, even though every stone that he threw reminded him of his first encounter with Cattie.

That encounter had taken place during one of his rare visits to the market-town, which was not only separated from him by the hills, but was a dozen miles away. There had been a fair in the place, that day, with hobby-horses in the evening, swinging-boats and cocoa-nut shies, and dancing, flaring lights. He had been the round of the shows, and was having his last shots at an Aunt Sally,—so many shots, indeed, and so successfully, that the showmen were getting tired of him. It was almost as if there was a fatal attraction for him in the great stuffed doll, with its blazing cheeks and twisted, leering mouth,—so much so that it seemed impossible for him to miss it. He had stopped for a moment to exchange a word and a laugh with the little crowd that had gathered admiringly around him, and as he turned himself about he had caught sight of Cattie. Laughing up at him, with her bright cheeks and her mocking mouth, she had reminded him sufficiently of the Aunt Sally to spoil the effect of his next shot. He had left the booth, after that, and followed her about for the rest of the evening. He had flung things at her, too, he remembered now,—orange-peel and paper-pellets, comfits and—kisses. She had

fled from him and he had pursued her, drawn by the attraction of her red cheeks as he had been drawn by the red cheeks of the Aunt Sally. And he had caught her in the end.

He sat up straighter, flinging a stone more viciously than before in the direction of the stump. He hit it right enough, he felt sure, even though there was no answering rap from the sodden wood, but only a musical answer from the water. The pony munched a little nearer, making those loud, strange sounds that seem so much louder and stranger in the failing light. The dog opened its eyes and shut them again. Groping about in the dusk, he found another stone.

Yes, he had caught her all right and from the very first moment of their marriage things had gone all wrong. It seemed incredible to him now that he should ever have been foolish enough to believe that they could possibly go right. She had hated his life and all that it stood for, from the start,—the valley and the sheep, the fratching hours when he was with her, and the empty hours when he was not. And by the end of the first month he had hated *her*—her harsh voice and her hard soul, her red cheeks and her mocking mouth.

He had grown more than ever to think of her as a sort of Aunt Sally, later on, seeing the colour fix in her cheeks and the tightening line of her lips. The likeness had accentuated the desire that had grown upon him to fling things at her coloured face (He threw another stone now with an added force that made it sing in the air). She had never known how often his

hand had crept to his side, stinging and aching with the strength of that desire. That was why it would be better for him not to enter the cottage to-night. He had always been able to hold his hand until now, but he knew he would not be able to hold his hand to-night.

His mind swung back again over the pass, and sank once more into the heart of the company he had left. The sheep-dog trials would be over by now, and shepherds and dogs would be thronging into the inn. There would be fire and light, drink and song. The innkeeper's wife would be moving about the place, and the innkeeper's buxom lasses. Good-humoured, smiling women, satisfied with their lot. Kindly and homely women, taking care of men, as men wanted to be taken care of, when the evening came.

And for him there was nothing but the slatternly cottage across, with for wife and companion a foul-tongued Aunt Sally at which he might not throw.

He got to his knees in a sudden frenzy of resentment and thwarted longing and something that was curiously like fear, flinging his stones in great, fierce flings at the motionless, sodden stump. He threw first with one hand and then with the other, the better to keep pace with the driving-power that was in him. He scrabbled furiously among the stones, and threw with both hands at once. It was as if he flung his very self at the stump, his hatred and his long martyrdom and all the pent-up vengeance that he dared not wreak. He swore as he threw, and cried,—great, tearing sobs that set the dog

whimpering in sympathy behind him. He threw until the whole world seemed full of whirling stones that yet went straight to their mark, until his arms slowed in spite of him, slowed and stopped. began and stopped until at long last his strength gave out altogether, and he sank down panting with his face against the grass .

He stayed in that position for such a long time that when he lifted his head again the light had gone entirely. Only a grey streak against the greyer earth spoke to him of the river, with over it a more solid piece of the dark that he knew to be the bridge. He got to his feet unsteadily, feeling heavy in all his limbs. He knew himself to be tired beyond any tiredness he had ever known, and longed to be indoors. He must have the comfort of a roof-tree over him, he said to himself, even though it was the doubtful comfort of a roof that sheltered Cattie.

But at least there was no longer any reason why they should not be together. His rage had spent itself now, and had been succeeded by a dreary peace. He no longer felt any hatred for his wife, nor even his customary sensation of dull bitterness. For a moment, indeed, as he stood wrapped in the soft mantle of the thick hill-dark, a touch of glamour came to him out of the past, showing her as she had appeared to him on that first evening, mocking, indeed, but desirable and alluring, a laughing, coloured, dancing thing in a spinning circle of flame. .

The dog had risen silently as he rose, and at a wave of his hand rounded up the pony, but when he got the latter to the bridge, he found that it would not cross it. Planting its forefeet,

it leaned back against the rein, and by the vibration of the leather in his hand he knew that it was trembling. The dog had left his heels and was running up and down the bank, a piece of the dark that had got loose and was running, running, running. It broke suddenly into loud barking,—crying and making little plunges at the old tree-stump in the shadow of the bridge

And suddenly he remembered that there was no old tree-stump in the shadow of the bridge .

## MISTS

THE clouds were already low when Dick Morphet entered the valley. They had hung a curtain over Grey Crags, hiding the dangerous scree. They had slung another over Dame's Fell, with its slippery grassy slopes. And now, slowly but smoothly, as if they moved on enormous wheels, they were passing across to Gartha, to shut out its precipitous slabs of rock.

He regarded them placidly, however, even though he was going to climb Gartha to look at Matt Airey's sheep, and it would be a nuisance if the mists caught them in the high allotment. He was a big, hardy man, accustomed to all weathers, and a drenching on the fells would make little difference to him. In any case things were going too well with him at the time to allow him to worry about such a trifle.

Things, indeed, generally did go well with him. He had been lucky, both in his farming and his horse-dealing, for he had a quick, shrewd mind, with a knack of jumping to the right conclusions. If he had grown a shade careless on this account, a bit too much inclined to trust to his precious 'knack', it had not, at all events, made him ungenial. Not yet had it been said of Dick Morphet that, when losses came his way—and he was bound to experience them sometimes—he did not know how to cut them gracefully.

He found Airey waiting for him at his farm-yard wall, and after seeing Dick's horse stabled they turned together up the fell. Behind them

the grey farm dwindled and dwindled until it looked like a miniature homestead. The long walls, making a network about it and curving and climbing in all directions, were grey, too. The whole world, in fact, seemed to have grown grey, except where, under their feet, there was colour in bracken and bent and heather.

Matt Airey spoke suddenly as he climbed a little in front, his shaggy beard and lank, loose-jacketed figure in curious contrast with the other's shaven neatness and trim cords.

'Ye're for getting wed, I hear?' he said, in the rather high-pitched voice which you hear sometimes in the dales, as if generations of shouting across great distances had lifted the register a little.

Dick Morphet laughed rather self-consciously.

'Well, I'm thinking of going that way,' he said shyly.

'And to Jim Atkinson's lass an' all?'

'That's so,' Dick said. 'The one they call Mary Ellen. Not that I've asked her yet!' he added, with a touch of humour. 'But I don't think I could do better.'

'Couldn't do worse!' Airey said succinctly, without pausing for time or tact. 'Couldn't do worse. She's a nowt!'

Dick laughed again, with the easy good temper of the man to whom life has been so kind that rough words cannot touch him.

'Come now, Matt!' he ex postulated. 'You're wrong there, anyhow. She's as fine a lass as steps.'

'Fine to look at, I'll grant ye!' Airey said contemptuously. 'Fine to talk with, and to dance with, and to play about with. But all the

fineness ye'll find in her when ye're wed is that she's too fine for a bit o' wark!'

'Ay, well, she'll likely do as well as most,' Dick said contentedly, if hardly with the enthusiasm to be expected of a budding lover 'Anyway, I've never seen anybody I liked better'

'Ye've never seen her, neither,' Airey said, 'if it comes to that Courtin'-folk never does They might all be as blinnd as a lot o' new-born kitlings till they're landed safe in t'kirk!'

But with all his cynicism he could not stir the other out of his satisfaction Dick did nothing but laugh at him 'Don't you bother about me,' he told him cheerfully 'I know what I'm about! I've found my judgment pretty sound up to now,' he added suddenly, with a little burst of self-praise which was very unusual with him, 'either over a horse or a woman!' and Airey, with a final grunt, dropped the subject as he opened the gate into the big allotment

They were a good while among the sheep, and by the time they came down found the mist looped in a heavy swathe between them and the farm below It thickened so much as they dropped into it that even Airey finally lost his bearings, and they decided to call a halt until it should choose to lift Leaning against a boulder, they stood smoking and chatting, until presently the short, chopping sound of a horse feeding near them caught their attention A dark shape showed itself after a while with its outlines blurred by mist, and as it warmed gradually into flesh and blood Airey uttered an *clamation*

'There's my gallowa!' he said the animal

came into being 'We can't be that far from my spot, after all!'

The horse, cropping continually further in their direction, revealed itself finally as a stout, upstanding cob, and Morphet, merely for the sake of something to do, began to bargain for it. He was always rather royal in his manner of summing up an animal and making a bid for it, but to-day he was even more regal than usual. The amount that he offered Airey, after what the latter privately considered a very casual inspection, set the dalesman staring 'Must be yon lass of his as is making him rash-like,' he commented secretly 'Ay, well, it bain't my place to be learning Dick Morphet his job!'

He did not jump at the offer, however, good as it was, but allowed himself the time-honoured privilege of seeming to think it over. He even haggled a little for the sake of appearances, then relented suddenly as to an old friend and clinched the bargain. The mist had lifted a little by the time they had finished their business, so, after Airey had caught the horse, they descended gropingly. Arrived at the farm, Dick was sent indoors to refresh himself before starting homewards, while the gallowa' was taken to the stable for an attempt at a brush-up.

The mist had not only thinned but vanished by the time Dick was ready to start, so that when he came out into the yard again the valley was clear before him. Airey was saddling his riding-horse for him by way of an extra attention, and as he stood waiting for him he whistled peacefully. Glancing about him, he noticed a small mountain pony tied to the yard gate.

'What's that you've got there?' he enquired, indicating the pony as Airey approached, but asking the question more from force of habit than from actual interest

Matt stared at him as if he could hardly believe his ears

'Yon?' he enquired, puzzled 'Why, ye ought to know! Yon's t' gallowa' as ye bought on t' fell'

Dick Morphet said '*What——?*' in a sort of shout, the blood rushing to his face, and then made a violent effort and repressed himself hastily 'Nay, I didn't just recognise it for the minute, that's all,' he finished quietly, climbing into his saddle, and, after bidding his host goodbye in his usual cheerful manner, was presently trotting away down the mountain road with the pony tripping behind him

Once safely out of sight of the farm, however, he got down and had a thorough look at his new purchase. The pony was a good enough pony, it was true, but it was a pony, nevertheless, and not by any stretch of imagination could it be called a cob. He remembered the price he had paid for it, and whistled dismally "'Twas the mist did me in,' he said to himself, suddenly recalling the tricks that mist will play with size. His foot was in the stirrup again when another thought struck him 'An' me bragging about

'y judgment of horses!' he reminded himself, grinning 'And women!' he added, more thoughtfully, as he took up his journey homeward.

\* \* \* \* \*

He did not marry Mary Ellen

## A BONE FOR MY SERVANTE

WHEN the old Squire of Killington lost his wife, and put up a tombstone to her memory, the whole countryside was scandalised by the inscription he put upon it. He had always been a reserved and difficult man, going his own way in spite of public opinion, and even those who knew him best had not always understood him. Most people neither understood him nor particularly liked him, but they had grown used to his eccentricities. It was admitted, however, on all sides, that his latest breach of convention was a matter for regret.

Regrettable or otherwise, he had chosen the words which had so much disturbed the population, found a mason to cut them, and had them placed beneath the record of his lady's birth and death, the good family she came from, the good family she had married into, and the name of the fine old manor-house that for so long had been her dwelling. He had paid her honour in that respect—though a good deal of it was his own honour, said the carping—but that was all he had done for her. There was no nonsense, for instance, about dearly-beloved wives, or, indeed, any expression of sorrow at her loss. And, at the foot of the stone, where presently the grass would creep up and try to hide it—'A bone would contente my servante' was the line with which he had commemorated a lifetime of devotion.

It was a true devotion, too, with which Mrs Rigg had surrounded her husband, neither

nervous nor propitiating, self-righteous nor grudging. It had merely created an atmosphere without obtruding itself, like all natural emanations of the spirit. Yet nobody had ever been able to gather whether the Squire was even aware of his good fortune, much less whether he appreciated it. All that he had seemed to do was to let it flow through him like the warm air on a summer's day, and had shown little gratitude for either. And now, when he had the chance to prove what he had felt in return, all that he could offer was this ridiculous comment which sounded like an insult.

Possibly because she had no children, but more probably because in any case her unselfishness would have known no limits, Mrs Rigg had extended it beyond her husband to her neighbours. They had been suspicious of it, at first, with that strange tendency to incredulity which any display of the Christian virtues seems to arouse in human nature. Presently, however, they were taking it for granted as much as did the Squire, and showed almost as little gratitude. But, when the time came for her to die, they had flocked to her funeral with a more genuine desire to pay her homage than is often the case on these occasions. It was their personal appreciation of her which they had wished to see on the stone, consequently, they were as much shocked by the Squire's lack of appropriate feeling as if it had been their own.

Lady Evesham, the dead woman's sister, driving over to visit the grave, and quite unprepared for the blow that was about to fall upon her, nearly had hysterics when she saw the in-

scription Her first impulse was to rush to the Hall to attack the perpetrator of the outrage, although nobody knew better than she did that such energy would be wasted Meeting the Vicar, however, as she tore from the church-yard—a rather young and recent Vicar, still diffident and shy—she fell upon him instead

‘Something must be done about it at once!’ she exclaimed indignantly, scarcely pausing to greet him, and apparently thinking it quite unnecessary to introduce the subject of her remarks ‘The thing is a perfect scandal “Bones”, indeed! As if my poor darling had been a dog! Not but what he treated her like a dog, as I often told him,—taking everything as a matter of course, and only grunting at her in return I never cared very much for William,’ she continued angrily ‘I never could see what Alice saw in him But I did not think he would sink to this That inscription is an insult to the whole family!’

‘It certainly seems an unusual text to have chosen,’ the Vicar said cautiously, slightly confused by the mixed references to pigs and dogs, but gathering something of her meaning He might have been even more cautious with advantage, as she proved to him instantly.

‘Text? It isn’t a text!’ she snorted at him contemptuously ‘You ought to know better than that It’s probably out of some of that rubbish of his that he’s always reading But, wherever he got it from, it’s completely impossible The sexton tells me that people come to look at it, and stand giggling at it Giggle! At my sister! And some reporter had the audacity

to make a note of it, in order to write about it to some newspaper

'And not a single word of affection or kindness!' she burst out again, after pausing for breath 'Nothing to show that he appreciated her I always did think that he cared for nobody but himself, and this proves it He never gave her credit for anything while she was alive, and now he has put this stigma upon her when she is dead!'

'Hardly a stigma, I think,' the Vicar plucked up courage to insist, not only because he felt that the truth demanded it, but because he was tired of being treated as a sort of verbally-assaulted Aunt Sally 'Rather peculiar, perhaps, and not quite what one would have wished—'

'It must be altered,' said Lady Evesham

The Vicar looked startled

'And quickly!' said Lady Evesham 'Before anybody else has a chance to laugh at it Somebody must speak to William at once, and speak firmly It wouldn't be the slightest use *my* doing it, of course, because he wouldn't listen to me The moment I start to talk to him, he turns his head away . But something must be done to remove this reflection upon my sister, and it seems to me that the most suitable person, in the circumstances, is yourself'

The Vicar protested, horrified, that he was nothing of the sort, and added that he had neither the right nor the wish to do as she suggested To interfere in the matter, he said, would be an impertinence that nothing could excuse Lady Evesham, however, paid not the slightest attention to his objections Sweep-

ing him with her down the path on the way to her car, she proceeded to point out to him his duty as she saw it

‘I shall write to the Chancellor myself, if you refuse to act,’ she threatened him, finally ‘Not but what he and William are as thick as thieves, and equally tiresome. But, in this case, at least, they must be made to listen to reason. That “text”, as you call it, will have to be changed, and I look to you to do it’

He stood staring after the car as it drove away— even the back of it had a rather threatening look, he thought—and then went home rather unhappily. He, too, was not altogether satisfied about that inscription, although nothing would have made him admit it to his late tormentor. New though he was to the place, he had had time to share in the common affection for Mrs Rigg, and no more than the rest of the parish did he consider that the Squire had done her justice. Other people had already taken much the same line as Lady Evesham, though he had no intention of letting her know that, either. Even his own wife, with what he considered to be an amazing absence of Christian charity, had passed judgment upon the Squire as lacking in decent human feeling. Only the mason who had carved the words, and so might possibly be expected to know something of their meaning, had refused to talk about them. ‘Reckon the Squire knows what he wants,’ was all he would say when the subject was mentioned. The Vicar wondered very much what had passed between the two taciturn gentlemen of advancing age, but had no means of finding

out He was to make a good guess at it, though, later on

He put the matter from his mind—or tried to put it from it—but found that the district in general would not let him forget it Lady Evesham wrote to him more than once, assuming—most unfairly, he thought—that the whole responsibility now lay with him Even the Parochial Council suggested that something should be done, though nobody had sufficient nerve to specify who should do it More people were found giggling at the wording on the stone —this time by the Vicar himself And presently, though dead against both his inclination and intent, he found himself walking up to the Hall to 'speak to' the Squire

He rang the bell in a feeble and cowardly manner, hoping fervently that the master might be out, but found, when the door was opened to him, that this was not the case Apparently, the Squire was there to be 'spoken to', if required With a sensation of nightmare he followed the servant to the library, to receive a curt handshake from his host and a wave towards a chair For some moments a conversation was conducted with great volubility on his own part about next to nothing at all, and by the usual series of grunts on the part of the Squire Then, conscious that his courage was ebbing with every minute that passed, he broke off what he was saying, and braced himself to his task.

'I am afraid I have come on a very delicate mission,' he began, as Vicars have begun from time immemorial, and with the same sinking at the heart 'Perhaps I have no right to mention

the matter at all, and indeed I should much prefer not to do so. But there seems to be a feeling abroad that the inscription on Mrs. Rigg's tombstone is not—not quite suitable. People seem troubled about it, if I may say so,—really very distressed! I have not been deputed to speak to you on the subject,' he added, boldly and quite untruthfully, 'but I can assure you that there is a very general desire to see the wording changed.'

The Squire had sat perfectly silent during this tirade, shot at him across his library table with that terrible fluency which is the nervous person's only alternative to complete paralysis. He had flushed a little, at first, and then had grown rather pale, but otherwise he had shown no emotion. His inscrutable face frightened the Vicar, as it always did. ('Now he'll eat me!' he said to himself, wildly, 'Or, he can't eat me'—which is it?) Losing all sense and tact at the same time as his nerve, he rushed on to say the most impossible things in the hastiest possible manner.

'Of course, I don't pretend to understand what is meant by the inscription,' he plunged forward. 'Perhaps there is no reason why I should. But I do feel that something more usual would have been more in keeping with the occasion; more beautiful, too, if I may say so. Something like "He giveth His beloved sleep,"' he added fatuously but determinedly. Or—"Though I walk through the shadow of death, etc. etc." . He scarcely knew what he was saying, by now, with the Squire staring at him without a hint of expression, and his own voice

sounding like something out of the wrong end of a tin trumpet ('But I'm going through with it!' he said to himself, doggedly 'I don't care if I lose the living. After all, she didn't only belong to *him*. She was a sort of public possession. And it's quite time somebody told him that he never appreciated her. Why, even the parish loved her better than he did, and goodness knows parishes are not *that* keen on loving anybody!') 'Of course, we could put up a memorial on our own account,' he went on, aloud 'But I hardly feel that that would meet the case. It would be *your* remembrance that she would value, and people don't seem to feel that this *is* a remembrance. In fact, they don't like it at all. Why, they even come and laugh at it!' he flung out, fiercely and suddenly, driven into saying what he had never meant to say by the immobility of the other and for the first time saw the Squire flinch. 'You see, we—we loved her, too,' he finished, simply and almost brokenly, his gift of speech falling away from him like a cast-off, troublesome garment.

There was a long silence after that, during which he decided that he would almost certainly have to give up the living. 'Better walk out than wait to be thrown out!' he said to himself desperately, and was just preparing to fade quietly from the room when the Squire suddenly came to life. Getting up, he handed his caller a book which had been lying on the table—('Some of that rubbish of his!' the Vicar quoted mechanically)—and pointed a lean finger at some marked pages. Then he went to a window and stood looking out, his back turned.

upon the pricked balloon which had been his fierce pastor. Pulling himself together after a moment, the latter tried to concentrate upon this sudden offering. It contained, he found, an account of that lively Elizabethan, Sir John Harington, and his appreciation of his dog, a loving testimony to loving-kindness which has survived for three centuries.

In a letter to the young Prince Henry, heir to King James I, Sir John speaks of his 'rare dogge', and proposes to 'give a brief historie of his good deedes and straunge feats' after what sorte his tacklinge was wherewith he did sojourn from my house at the Bathe to the Greenwiche Palace, and deliver up to the cowrte there such matters

were entrusted to his care. This he hathe often done, and came safe to the Bathe, or my house here at Kelstone, with goodlie returnes from such nobilitie as were pleased to emploie him. Neither must it be forgotten as how he once was sente with two charges of sack wine from the Bathe to my howse, by my man Combe, and on his way the cordage did slackene, but my trustie bearer did now beare himself so wisely as to covertly hide one flasket in the rushes, and take the other in his teethe to the howse, after which he went forthe, and returnede with the other parte of his burden to dinner.

This famous dog was stolen, and 'conveyed to the Spanish ambassadors,' who set so much store by him that they could not be got to part with him. Sir John, however, was able to prove that the dog was his, by means of certain tricks which he made him perform, and started to

take him homewards 'But, *jubes renovare dolorem*, I will now saie in what manner he died As we traveled towardes the Bathe, he leapede on my horses necke, and was more earneste in fawninge and courtinge my notice, than what I had observed for time backe, and, after my chidinge his disturbinge my passinge forwardes, he gave me some glances of such affection as moved me to cajole him, but, alas! he crept suddenly into a thorny brake, and died in a short time'

Towards the end of the letter comes the following passage

'As I doubt not but your Highnesse would love my dogge, if not myselfe, I have been thus tedious in his storie, and again saie, that of all the dogges near your father's court, not one hathe more love, more diligence to please, or less paye for pleasinge, than him I write of, for verily *a bone would contente my servante*, when some expecte greater matters'

The Vicar sat still for some time after he had finished reading the story, his thoughts busy with a dog-ghost of his own that followed him down the years No matter what doubts he might feel in the future about that inscription, at that moment it seemed to him quite justified How passionately, he thought, lifting his ey to the figure still blocking the long window, do we run to the misunderstanding of our fellow-creatures! He saw now that the Squire had been well aware of his wife's value all the time. There had been no need of any officious intruder to tell him what angel had blessed his days. While she had lived, he had seemed indifferent

to that special grace, but, when she was dead, he had chosen a lovely story to illustrate its memory. He must have chosen it, too, for its very ambiguity, so that none should guess at his hidden pain. The foolish might laugh as much as they liked, they could never reach to the truth behind 'A bone *did* contente my servante!' the Vicar found himself saying, almost with tears, recalling the lost beauty of that mind and character. To how many of us, he thought, with our egotism and greed, will it be possible to pay that homage at the Judgment?

He got up, after a while, and went softly towards the door, feeling that only by going in silence could he show his acceptance and contrition. But, just as he reached it, the Squire spoke, though without turning.

'She liked dogs,' was all he said.

## BEAUTY'S DAUGHTERS

BEST put on thy old stuff gown Yon pink cotton's over thin Weather'll likely break afore so long

*Nay, it's a bonny day, as bonny as ever I see*

Leaves, look ye, is all turning their backs Cows is all come off t'hill while morn They're in t'bottom field, a-liggin' agen t'wall

*Weather's like true love—ower set to break*

Ay, but wind is low, you'll think on, and hills is far ower clear Church clock might be in t'house I heard t'river in the night Hark to hound-music on the wind!

*Nay, I hear nowt but a whistle in the lane*

There's thunner about, that I'll swear Flowers in t'garden be ower bright Thrushes is calling, seeking for the rain A bonny fool ye'll look in yon pink gown

*Hedges be that thick no drop comes through*

I'll be bound it's thinking o' blowing up for storm Rooks is flying that low you can hear their wings There's mares'-tails in the sky an' all.

*Hedges be that tall the wind gangs by*

We're sure an' certain going to have a change Like enough we'll get it bitter cold You'll be shivered to death in yon pink rag

*There's more ways nor a stuff gown o' keeping out the cold!*

I'se never wrong about t'element, not I, and there's no wear like a bit of honest stuff

*Roses ha' pink gowns I mun ha' pink an' all  
Roses be sweet to see I mun be sweet an' all Fox-*

*gloves is kings and queens Honeysuckle's don d i'  
gold There's no stuff gowns in the lane*

Yon's a drop o' rain on the sill Nay . . . it's  
just an old body's tear

## WHITE CLOVER

SOON there would be nothing left of the hind's cottage. Already the roof was stripped, the woodwork gone, the kitchen hearthstone was up and was lying across a heap of rubbish. The greater part of the cottage was in shadow, but a summer evening sun gilded the openings of doorway and window, and stretched warmly along the land without to the good farmhouse on the slope of the hill. There was a settled look about the place which it had lacked for some time, showing that already a year or two had passed since the unsettlement of the War.

James Gibson, however, did not look settled. He stood staring about him in the dismantled kitchen. He was an old man, with the air of a good-class farmer, which was somewhat belied by his shabby and ill-kept clothes. Leaning on his stick, he turned slowly as on a pivot, staring at every inch of the stripped habitation, though, no matter how often he turned, he never allowed himself to look out at the farmhouse on the hill.

It is true that he dropped his gaze from the tie-beams as he heard a motor-car draw up on the highway to his right, but even then he kept it fixed on the golden square, and would not permit it to wander in the direction of the house.

Nothing happened, though, for a little while, and he had turned away again when a girl appeared in the gilded opening. She was a pleasant but business-like girl, dressed in pleasing but business-like country clothes. She paused a moment behind the old man, waiting for him.

to turn, but this time he did not turn, so at the end of the moment she said 'Good day!'

'Eh? Beg pardon?' He swung round, startled  
'I said "Good day"!'

He nodded surlily, moving away 'Oh, ay—  
good day!'

'Mr Gibson, I think?' said the girl, amiably

Mr Gibson admitted, grudgingly, that he *was*  
Mr Gibson

'I'm glad to meet you'

Mr Gibson asked her, in a more grudging tone than ever, not to mention it, and returned to his inspection of the roof The girl came inside, still amiable

'A mess, isn't it? And likely to be, for some time yet I'm past nearly every day, and the men are so slow you'd hardly believe!'

Mr Gibson, irresistibly drawn, intimated that labour wasn't what it was in his young days

'No, nor lots of other things,' the girl agreed, 'or people, either'

'That's so Farmers, for one Ay, and farmers' sons' He added, suddenly and viciously, as if something had bitten him—'Ay, and farmers' wives'

'Oh, come! They're not so bad, surely?' she smiled cheerfully

He snorted—'Not so bad at everything but a bit of honest work!' and then, dropping his voice and jerking his head towards the door, demanded if any more of her 'morter-lot' would be coming in

'Motor-lot?' she enquired, bewildered

'Yon was a morter-car, wasn't it, as drove up J t now? It's queer how folks'll stop and gloat

over a house as is being pulled down, same as they'll stop when a body's taken bad in the street!'

She collected her wits with an obvious effort 'No,' she said 'Oh, no! They're not coming in . I hope you don't think I'm—er—gloating, do you?' she asked anxiously 'I assure you I take quite a scientific interest in the case!'

'Oh, you do, do you?' he grunted scornfully

'It's the hind's cottage, isn't it, that they're pulling down, in order to build another? Perhaps you'll think it gloating, but there is something sad about seeing a hearthstone dragged up like that' She laid a hand for a moment on the tilted flag 'How long do you think it's been down?'

'Nigh on a hundred year'

'Of course, the new house *will* be a better one,' the girl began again, presently

'That's to be seen This here was built in my grandfather's time, when he had the farm up there' For the first time he lifted his eyes to the farmhouse on the hill 'He thought it good enough for his man, and my father thought it good enough, and so did I But seemingly it isn't good enough for the new generation'

'Oh, well, that's progress, you know'

'What is?'

'Going one better than grandfather'

'Much good may it do 'em!' he snorted, and dropped the subject. Again he looked at the door 'You didn't see anybody about when you come, did you?'

'Waiting about, do you mean?' asked the girl, puzzled

'Well—sort o' thinking about things'

'No, I didn't see anybody like that'

He turned his back then, as if that subject was dropped, too 'Ay, well, it's all right, thank ye'

'Are you expecting somebody?' she ventured  
'Perhaps I'm in the way?'

'Nay, it's no matter It's only my—only John Gibson'

'John Gibson? Your son, do you mean?'

'I mean John Gibson'

'He'll be turning up, I expect,' said the girl, at which he nodded indifferently 'A fine fellow, isn't he?' she added suddenly, with a little rush

'Oh, ay?' He strolled over to the window, and stood looking out at the land 'Oats doing well, I see'

'A son any man might be proud of' said the girl 'A husband any woman might be proud of, too!'

'And roots'

'The whole countryside thinks him simply splendid' she glowed 'Look how he served right through the War, joining up the first week! He got his commission, of course, and the Military Cross, and *everybody* says he ought to have had the VC!'

'I don't see t'beast anywheres about,' said old Gibson, craning his neck out of the ruined window

'Beast?' she repeated blankly, bewildered

'John Gibson axed me to meet him here, he'd summat to show me Said it'd take a lot o' beating, even at the Royal, so I took it for granted it must be a cow'

She said 'Oh' and the colour came rather angrily into her face 'So that's why you came?' she demanded quickly 'Not because he's a hero, and home again at long last, but simply and purely to look at a cow'

'I'd go a fairish way to look at a good cow,' he answered her obstinately. There was a pause, during which her colour faded, and then he swung round on her sharply 'You seem to know a deal about John Gibson, taking it all in all!'

'Everybody knows about him!' She was aglow again at once 'There's a good deal to know. Everybody knows that you quarrelled with him because he insisted on going to fight, and that you won't speak to him now he's back. Everybody knows that you threw up the farm so that he shouldn't have it, even if he came through, and that it's only by luck he's managed to get it now. And everybody knows you've gone and poked yourself away into rotten little rooms in the village, though both your son and your son's wife would be glad to give you a home!'

'Ay, ay. You know a deal.'

'Well, it's true, isn't it?' she asked defensively, although a little crushed by his quiet reception of her attack

'What if it is? It's no business of yours, as far as I know, but—what if it is?'

She dropped her inimical tone then as he had dropped his sarcasm 'Only that it's time it stopped, isn't it?' she said pleadingly 'All the bitterness, I mean, and the black memories. Your son's unhappy because you won't make

friends He's so unhappy that he can't settle to his work He's proud of *you*, if you aren't of him, and he wants to give you the best he has. Won't you bury the past and begin again?"

'Nay',

'Oh, but why not?'

• 'He went to the War without axing leave'

'The country needed him'

'Happen But he should have axed leave'

'He told you about it, though, didn't he? He didn't just make off He told you he *must* go—'

His face hardened 'Ay, that's it! "Must"—that's the word! Suchlike impudence to his own father!'

'He didn't mean it for impudence, I'm sure  
The country called him—England—his duty  
—'

'His duty was to me'

'Not then Not at a time like that!' Her voice rang a little and then softened 'But it's yours for the asking—now'

'I want nowt with it—now,' said old Gibson, and after that there was a long pause The girl's hand lay, brown and capable, on the dusty hearthstone She looked at it thoughtfully

'It's just pride that's in the way, it seems to me,' she said slowly, at last. 'Nothing but pride The love's underneath it all the time, just as if it was something underneath this hearthstone, unable to breathe and grow'

'Just pride, is it?' It was his turn to flare now, straightening his back and glowering at her. 'Just pride?' He seemed to be trying to hold the next words back, but they came in

spite of him 'Ay, well, happen it's partly that; but there's summat else'

'Something else?'

'His mother was badly at the time, though we'd said nowt to the lad for fear of putting him about. But doctor had tellt me private-like as she'd nobbut a month or two to live. Ay, and die she did, right enough, and afore ever he'd gitten to France!'

'Oh!' She swung round towards him with her hands clasped 'I didn't know! I knew that she died, but I didn't know—!' But *he* didn't know, either,' she went on quickly 'He wasn't to blame if he didn't know'

'There's things folks should know with their hearts, if they're that blind they can't see 'em with their eyes'

'But his duty—! Oh, what's the answer? Anyhow—why didn't you tell him?'

'We didn't, that's all,' said old Gibson 'His mother wouldn't, and I—couldn't' He turned away

She murmured — 'Why — couldn't — you?' scarcely breathing the words, and he answered her fiercely

'Because I could happen have stood him putting the country afore me, afore his duty to me, and the farm where his fathers were bred, and a deal more, but I'm danged if I could have stood him putting it in front of his mother!' He stumped back to the window once more, if feeling the need of air, and it was some time before he spoke again 'Nay, I can't see myself having a deal to do with John Gibson, after that There's another reason an' all why

we're best apart, and that's his new-fangled wife.'

'Why, what have you got against *her*?'

'Plenty—and more to that! She's a lady, for one thing,—at least, so folks say'

'Well, that's an accident that might happen in any family,' said the girl, soothingly

'Ay, and to make things worse, she's been a morter-car driver an' all!'

The girl smiled

'I suppose that *was* a bad beginning! All the same, it's possible she may turn out a good wife in spite of these drawbacks'

'About as likely as raising a crop without first sowing the seed!'

'She might—love him, for instance—'

'Love' Old Gibson snorted 'There's nobbut one sort of love a farmer wants in his wife, and that's a love o' *work*!'

'You don't believe in love then, Mr Gibson?' the girl asked gently, but he took no notice.

'I should ha' thought a lad o' mine would ha' had more sense!'

She persisted, however 'You don't believe in love?' she said again,—'you, who quarrelled with your only son because he didn't love enough to know what he hadn't been told!'

'Nay, what? What d'ye mean?' He glared at her and looked away 'I wish I'd never tellt you a word!'

'Don't wish that'

'Ay, but I do!' He stumped about angrily for a moment, and then leaned a second time out of the window 'It's queer I can't see yon beast anywheres about!'

She crossed over to him then with an air of decision 'Mr Gibson,' she began firmly, 'there's something I ought to tell you. When John said he'd something to show you, he didn't mean cattle. He meant me.'

'Eh? John?' He gaped at her, fumbling at the name as if he did not recognise it. Then, he grasped the reference—'You're over free wi' your "Johns"'

'It's the usual thing, isn't it, to call one's husband by his Christian name?'

'Husband? Nay, by God! What's it all about?' The blood came rushing into his face. 'You mean you're?'

'The accident—the motor-driver—the "lady," if you like—but I'm John's wife first. And, by the law of the usual thing, which I quoted just now, I'm your daughter, too.'

'Nay, then, but you're not!' he burst out violently. 'I'd not have you at a gift!'

'That's not kind.'

'It's nobody's blame but your own,' he flung at her, silencing her, afterwards—'He's not coming, then?' he demanded sourly. 'John, I mean? He's ashamed, likely, as well he may!'

'Ashamed?' she said proudly. 'Ashamed of doing what he thought right,—of having fought, of having suffered, of having come through? If he's ashamed, there's nobody else in the whole world that's ashamed for him,—no, not even you!'

'You've no call to say what I am, one way or t'other,' he answered her roughly. 'Haven't you eddled enough in other folks' business for to-day?'

She sighed, spreading out her hands if throwing up the sponge 'Oh, I was wrong to come,—I can see it now! John would have done it ever so much better,—dear John! But I begged him to let me try instead, and he hasn't got to the stage of refusing me anything yet'

'Then the sooner he begins, the better,—your dear John!'

'You see, I thought, perhaps—I hoped—I was almost sure—' She tangled her sentence hopelessly and began again bravely, though with a touch of wistfulness 'I still don't see why we shouldn't be good friends'

'There'll be the pair o' you, then,' said old Gibson, 'you and your man,—a couple o' blind bats!'

'You accused John just now of not being able to see with his heart. It's because I can see with mine that I *know* you and I can be friends!' He said nothing to that, and she followed up her advantage 'We could be the happiest farming-folk in Great Britain if you'd only try,—the happiest farmer, the happiest farmer's father, and the happiest farmer's wife!'

'A bonny farmer's wife *you* make, I'll be bound!' he snorted, though he was weakening.

'Come and see my house—you can eat off the floors! My dairy—it's as clean as a new pin! I can cook,—oh, can't I just cook! And as for sewing and so on, well—' eyeing his untidy garments until he wriggled uncomfortably—'I could turn out that jacket of yours looking like new!'

'I never did hold much by them as was always blowing their own trumpet!' said old Gibson, primly

'Come and hear John blow it, then!' she challenged him, gaily 'He'll blow till he bursts' Suddenly she altered her tone and began pleading again 'He's up there at the farm, waiting for you—looking for you—longing for you Come!'

'Nay'

'There's the car You wouldn't have to walk That was my car you heard outside—his car—yours And you'll be welcome,—welcome white clover!'

'I said nay'

'There's simply no end to what we want to show you! Never a thing we do but we wonder what you would say Why, only just now we've had a record offer for a bull-calf, but John can't bring himself to part with him until he's been seen by the old dad!'

He had an obvious struggle with himself over the bull-calf, but won, striking his stick sharply on the floor 'Haven't I tellt you nay and nay?' He made for the door, determined to bring the situation to an end 'If you're that fond o' work, my lass, you'd best get back to it afore it makes off!'

She sighed, also turning away 'I'd a piece of work to do here, and I've bungled it, I'm afraid!' Her unseeing eyes, fixed on her failure, suddenly found themselves staring into the groove left by the lifted hearthstone She uttered an exclamation 'Why, look—just when I was talking about it, too!—isn't that—white clover?'

'Eh? What's that? What d'ye say?' He hesitated, as if suspecting some device to keep him, and then returned reluctantly He would have come for nothing but stock or crop

'Clover where the hearthstone's been!' said

the girl 'How long do you say it's been down—fifty years?"

'Nigh on a hundred, I should think'

'And the seed's been under it all the time!"

Her voice dropped to an awed tone 'Like hidden gold, isn't it? And clover *is* gold. White clover-seed to-day is worth a pound a pound'

'A pund a pund?' It was old Gibson who sounded awed now

'So John says'—mischievously—'dear John!"

'A pund a pund!' Old Gibson peered and pondered, and then straightened his old back. 'Ay, well, as there's nowt more to stop waiting about for, I'll bid you good day'

'No!' she said 'No!' She reached out a hand and laid it daringly on his arm 'Wait a minute Can't you see? That clover's your love for John, Mr Gibson, just as that hearthstone's your heavy pride. You think it's dead, just as they thought there was nothing under the stone; and yet—there was clover all the time! Love's just as vital and strong as clover-seed, Mr. Gibson, and a good deal more valuable. It's worth more than its weight in gold. Won't you try shifting the stone, Mr Gibson, and give the clover a chance?"

He might have been the hearthstone itself, she thought, he seemed so obstinate and rigid. Then—'More than a pund a pund?' he repeated, looking at her

'Much more. Oh, much, *much* more!"

He ruminated 'A pund a pund?" . Suddenly, with a half-sigh, he relaxed 'Ay, well!" . His eyes twinkled 'That there morter-car o' yours hold two?"



1914—1918



## HE-WHO-DIED-TO-DAY

THE Big House and the Little awoke in the early summer morning, and looked at each other. The windows of both houses were wet as if it had been raining. But it had not been raining.

'I knew as soon as I awoke,' said the Big House on the Hill.

'I have known all night long,' said the Little House by the Beck.

'It is I who must mourn,' said the Big House, importantly. 'You are not the family place now. When people talk about Cancefield, they mean me.'

'They did not always mean you,' said the Little House. 'They did not mean you when the Armada came, and I sent a man to sea. They did not mean you when Prince Charlie came, and I gave a man to his banner. They meant me.'

'That's long ago,' said the Big House on the Hill. 'Now you're only Cancefield Farm. I've even heard you called Cancefield Cottage, though I grant you it was an American who said that. I, on the other hand, am Cancefield Court. It is I whose blinds must be pulled down to-day. Why, now I come to think of it, I don't believe you've any to pull!'

'I should not pull them down if I had,' said the Little House. 'I drew the blinds of my soul at milking-time last night. But I shall pull up even those in a little while. I must carry on for the pride of my finished race.'

'You may call it *your* race,' the Big House sneered, 'but nobody else will, certainly not the County people or the newspapers. Why, they have been Cancefields of Cancefield Court for the last fifty years!'

'What is fifty years?' said the Little House. 'I have slept and wakened again without missing as much.'

'That was in your slow old times, which people have forgotten. Things are different now we can easily build up a family in fifty years, nowadays.'

'And lose it,' said the Little House. 'And lose it . . .' And neither house spoke again for a little while.

'Of course, I can understand your putting in a claim,' continued the Big House, presently. 'But you are not the mother. You are only an old nurse whom the family has outgrown.'

'No, no, I am the mother—the *mother*!' cried the Little House. 'It is you who have no claim.'

'All old nurses feel like that, but it's nonsense, of course. And He-Who-Died-To-day didn't even have you for a nurse. He was born *here*. Why, anybody could see he came out of a Court, not out of a Cottage!'

'All the same, he was mine—*mine*!' moaned the Little House.

'It's no use going on like that,' said the Big House. 'You must face facts. Why, I never heard him mention you! He never even looked aside at you when he went away.'

'He knew I was there,' said the Little House, bravely, though it did not know that he knew.

'I doubt it,' said the Big House. 'I doubt it.'

Anyway, I'm the mother of the race *now*. There was no end to the money they spent on me. Trippers get tickets to come and look over me. They wouldn't do that for you. There'd be nothing to see'

'I have the singing-beck and the cherry-tree, 'Marble steps pillars walls of dressed stone,' said the Big House 'You've nothing to match those'

'I have a whitewashed front and a porch with a rose'

'Big rooms Big windows that you can see right across the bay! Yours are as narrow as swords and as dark as dreams'

'The peace of the race is under my blackened beams'

'I have lawns and terraces,' said the Big House, glibly 'Herbaceous borders . . . urns . . . acres of glass heat ,'

'I stand on a strip where the plough and the meadow meet'

'Electric light everywhere,—even in the cellars Silk-shaded lamps upstairs,—silk, don't forget! You have only farthing dips'

'They shine in the oak like the lights of drowning ships'

'Look at the people who come to call on me!' bragged the Big House 'The "quality", I think you call them. And they come to dine'

'We eat, even here,' said the Little House 'And it was I who saved the gold that bought the wine'

'My rooms are always full of orchids and carnations Palms dwarf-trees from Japan And when we give a ball—'

‘But the flower of the race was bred in me, after all’

‘They were the Cancefields of Cancefield Court!’ said the Big House, angrily ‘I should have thought I had said enough to prove it, by now Why, that American girl said you weren’t like a real house at all! You were like the ghost of a house, she said, and a ghost can’t be even a nurse, let alone a mother’

‘Yes, yes, I am the mother—the *mother*!’ cried the Little House, and two drops ran down each of its little windows as if it was raining But it was not raining

At dusk that evening a young man came up the drive, so quietly and lightly that the lodge-keeper did not notice him He did not keep to the drive, however, but cut off across the lawns, walking across flower-beds and borders as if he did not know they were there When he came to the high hedge which the new house had built so that the old house should be shut out, he melted from one side of it to the other as if it had had no concrete existence

So he came to the Little House that was white like a moth in the growing dusk, with eyes that were velvet-black and hollow as if they had wept The Little House itself was very still, though from behind it came the sound of folks moving in the shippion and of pails that clinked

He threw his arms around the cherry-tree and laid his face against the bark He knelt on one knee and dabbled his fingers in the singing-beck He ran his hand over the whitewashed walls and peered in between the mullions ‘I have co e

home to you, Mother,' he said to the Little House. But the Little House would not speak.

He looked at the rose on the porch to see if it was doing well. He looked at the flowering currant beside the door. He slid round the house and peeped in at the shippion, but they were so busy there that they never saw him. And between each of these things he said—'I have come home to you, Mother,' to the Little House.

'Who are you?' asked the Little House crossly, when it could bear it no longer.

'I am He-Who-Died-To-day,' said the young man.

The Little House looked at the slim young figure in khaki, and shut its eyes. 'I do not know you,' it said obstinately.

He wandered away behind the apple-trees in the little orchard, and when he came back he was slightly different. He wore doublet and hose and a ruff, and a pointed black beard that looked rather Spanish. 'Now do you know me?' he asked.

'Ye—es,' said the Little House, rather reluctantly. 'You are Philip.'

'I am He-Who-Died-To-day,' said the young man.

He disappeared for a moment behind the little loft where the hens had already gone up to roost, and when he returned through the dusk, he was different again. This time he wore knee-breeches and a tail-coat and buckled shoes, and he carried a fighting-cock under his arm.

'Now do you know me?' he asked.

'Yes!' said the Little House, with a sudden

crow, as if it had been the cock. 'You are Harry!'

'I am He-Who-Died-To-day,' said the young man, and they smiled at each other, remembering the main that had been fought on laid turf in the little parlour

He was away quite a long time the third time he disappeared, and when he came back he was a little boy, with long trousers buttoned up over his little coat, and with bobbed hair and ruffles 'Oh, my dear little George!' cried the Little House, without waiting for the usual question

'I am He-Who-Died-To-day,' said the little boy

The Little House positively trembled with excitement, wondering what it would see next, but when the young man came back again as a soldier in khaki it turned sulky once more 'Your home is up there on the hill,' it told him

'Where?' asked the young man, turning to look 'I see no home'

'That big house, up on the hill,' said the Little House, firmly 'It has marble steps and pillars, and walls of dressed stone It is a very grand house'

'Really!' said the young man

'It has lawns and terraces, conservatories and urns It is a very grand house'

'You surprise me!' said the young man

'Rooms as big as ballrooms . . . orchids electric light,' said the Little House, glibly 'It is a very grand house indeed'

'I believe I do see something like a house,' said the young man, wrinkling up his eyes, 'but I should never have noticed it if you hadn't

mentioned it. It is like a piece of mist that would blow away in a wind. What about it?"

"Only that it is your home," the Little House said again. "You were born there."

The young man burst out laughing, and in the shippon they said—"There's the death-owl on the screech!"

"Nonsense!" he said. "How could I be born in a house made of mist? Why, it hasn't even begun to come alive! It won't be a real house for a long time yet." He turned his shoulder upon it. "I have come home to you, Mother," he said again.

"Son," said the Little House

## PAGEANT (JANUARY 1914)

No horse will stand in this garden

Out on the drive it was black and very cold, with a frost-mist mixed into the dark that iced the cheek and tingled the blood. The yellow windows, all the length of the house, were all the warmer for the cold-breathing dark outside. The tread of the gravel was like crunched biscuit, and the cold of it struck through to the feet. The sound of it under the feet was sharp like music. The frost seemed to turn everything into music. Somebody called from the shippion behind the house, and the name rang along the air. An impatient engine a mile away whistled for the line to clear. From over the hill came the clink of the forge, the bright hammer-hammer of steel upon steel. Both whistle and hammer spoke on a singing note like the magnified tinkle of falling ice.

There were horses clattering in the stable-yard, the hoofs ringing as the forge had rung. Lamps flashed from hidden places, throwing long shafts across a wall. The wall looked sudden and shadowy under the light, as if evoked by it into transient being.

There was a step on the drive under the stooping trees, and somebody drew a blind, letting a trap of light across the dark, but catching nothing in the luminous net. The passer-by was now on a mound all white with rag, under a sycamore by the wall. The grass of the mound felt rocky and rough, harder than the gravel and without its ring. The boughs of the syca-

more were blacker than the night Bare lilac-bushes made a little room .

The watcher could still see those other rooms into which he had stared . soft curtains and soft lights, old china, soft water-colours on the walls Card-tables with shining packs glass, and tinted jellies and lit candles and coloured flowers He could see the guests, too, laughing and unafeard, with all their backs turned obstinately to the dark

A brake was slipped in the yard, and the heads of the first pair showed through the big doors The beams from the lamps flooded the empty flower-beds, the trunks of the trees and the lower storey of the house The clatter changed to the steady thud of hoofs and the crackle of rolling wheels on a frozen drive There had been voices in the yard, calling and snapped oaths, bustling and backing of horses into place, scraping of sharps along the icy stones, the sudden roar of a tuned-up car, the jingle of chains against a pole Now there was an ordered procession through the doors, the silent men mere shadows behind their lamps More carriages were coming up from the village, passing the garden-wall before turning into line Their lamps topped the curve of the hill first, looking like jack-o'-lanterns skimming the dark road Along two roads others came from the east, so that the night seemed full of luminous fallen stars The mound was an island of dark and quiet in the midst of moving blacknesses and little suns, sparks struck by the sharps from the iron road, the silver sound of jingled harness, and the harsh sound of grinding brakes.

The first carriage halted at the steps, and in the place of the hall door there came a yellow square. A man-servant came out and looked down the line, a black-paper figure in a gilded frame. Almost at once the horses began to chafe, backing and sidling and pushing against their poles, until the garden was full of slurred wheels and musical clang and clash. Now and then the black lash of a whip flickered across a bar of light, and a voice cursed softly into laid-back ears.

Figures came down the steps, and others gathered above. A carriage door slammed, and there was a forward movement down the rank. And instantly the watcher saw another line,—full carriages of mourners, empty carriages of respect. They stretched away into the dark, led by something he could not see.

Suddenly there was panic all along the drive. The front horses wheeled and reared, forcing the whole line sharply back, and there was stamping, and the reversing of gears, and a chorus of clicks like so many death-watches in a wall. Tangled confusion, and shouting and a rush and running of feet. and then the line straightened itself out. Away into the dark the steady hoofs went home.

And before the year was gone, the young folk were gone, each to his or her post. The horses were gone, too, scattered and sold. The men on the boxes marched in khaki ranks, side by side with the men on the cushioned seats . . .

No horse will stand in this garden

## THE COMING DAY (JUNE 1914)

IT was one of those Halls where house and folk and land used to carry the same name. It stood on the slope of the fell, with its thousands of sheep all heafed behind. The river ran below it, beyond the road.

The courtyard was framed for you, as you came up, by a barred archway in the monster wall. You got a glimpse of the house as well, mulioned, casemented, with diamond eyes. The sun was hot on the gray place, and that day they were clipping the sheep.

All over the yard were the creels and the cotton kytles of the men. The girls peeped from the fleecing-room in their cool and coloured frocks. It was a boon clip, and the neighbours were there to help, farmers' daughters and lads and even the young squires.

The women came out with plates and tall jugs, and the men drank, sitting on their creels. Later there would be a feast, and trotting-races and sports. The air was live with talk, swift laughter and the sun. There was scraping of little hoofs, quick breath, the click of glancing shears. And over all was the endless wailing of the sheep.

Ever since dawn they had been bringing the sheep to the pens, ever since dawn parting the mothers from the lambs. Ever since dawn the wailing had gone on. When I went into the house I lost the laughter and talk, but the wailing was in the house from roof to floor.

In the house I heard the pleasant chink of

pots Through cool rooms I saw darting figures pass, through open doors an open hearth with a crane,—a carved press of clap-bread,—the flagged hall set for a meal I followed worn steps and sagged floors, and everywhere I heard the sheep

I found these words in a panelled room, oil-polished till it shone, with an orchard beyond the mullioned frame, and velvety roses on the sill 'I dread the coming day' was written over the door 'I dread the coming day'

Nobody knew who set them there,—a soul too weak for life, or a desperate spirit bracing itself for fight? Some broken owner mortgaged out of his own? Some hidden sinner preparing to meet his Judge? Nobody knew whose words were over the door

But they know over whose doors the words are set to-day, who sleep with an aching throat and wake with a catching heart They know, whose lads are scattered like sheep upon the hills No house in England where they are not found *We* know

## WIND IN THE NIGHT

LAST night, something came in the wind. When I dropped asleep there was a sough through the trees like the wash of a neap-tide. The murmur of them ebbed to and fro, like the talk of folk drowsing to their rest. Now and then it rose on a soft swell, and the sleepy heads swayed together as they spoke. The sound grew to the faint roar of surf on a far rock coast, but always it fell again, lulled without cause, like unfinished speeches broken in a dreamer's mouth. Later it must have died and left the trees in peace, for in my sleep I looked no more from a window over the tide.

But later still that which rode on the wind came by. Suddenly the house was filled, all the air changed and stirred. The flail of it smote through the rooms, and flung the open doors to their posts. The glass of the windows rattled as if to guns, and the unfastened casements creaked and jarred. The curtains filled and the blinds clapped, and the whole house shook and thrilled. Then it was gone, that strong presence through the rooms, but it had taken away the peace of the night. All through the house was the stir of hearts that wake and minds that hark. No one moved, but for long enough there were feet on the stair.

The wind in the night seems to blow from no quarter that one knows. One never says it is north, east, west, or south. It comes, and then as suddenly it is gone, it is in all the house all at once, and by the ways it

enters it never leaves It is just the Wind in the Night

I thought of it sweeping down the village street, of all the windows open in its path, of the faces, tired or sweet, that would wake under its hand, of the pricked ears of sleeping dogs, and the clinking of chains in the horses' stalls I thought of the flowers that would sway and stoop, and then stand steady as before I thought of the lads in France, of the doors through which they had gone out, of the souls that ride on the wind

What doors had clapped for those that would never return? This is his . and his . and his

But the dawn came sweetly,—gray, and then rose and gold, and all the day there has been no news All the day has been rose and gold, and full of sweetbriar and song Life is still rich and good, and still there is no news

What was it came with the wind in the night?

## THE OLD ROAD-SCRAPER IS DEAD

THE old road-scraper is dead. Perhaps he would have died long since but for the War, but the War, which killed off men as flies are killed by the frost, kept him alive.

He had been ailing for some time, and it fretted him that he could not work, knowing that after the empty days comes Death. So he would not stay in bed, but crept out, sometimes on one stick, and sometimes on two, and on very brave days he would have no stick at all, but instead of it a scraper and a spade. Then he would scrape away at the road for a little while, or tidy the plot of grass before his cottage door. The children, he said, made it a 'sad-like spot'. He had grown-up children of his own, who saw to his wants, and others who were at the front and away. He would have preferred not to owe them anything at all. 'Nay, nay,' he said, 'It's niver t'le kitling as brings t'aald cat a mouse!'

He was very tired of life when the War began, and then he grew very spirited and keen. With a blanket fastened beneath his chin he would go out on his sticks and talk to the passers-by. He was there on the days when the sun shone, and when it was bleak after rain, and when there was a thin wind. People gave him the War news as they came and went, showed him pictures, and read to him from the papers. In those days everyone came by with a mouth full of news or a paper in his hands,—the grocer, the carrier, the solicitor, the parson and the Squire.

Even the tramps read as they went. He would watch them all as they came up the hill under the shadow of the big chestnuts, or out of the country under the cherry and the ash, and many of them would stop for a bit of a crack. It was amazing how he grasped what they were doing 'down yon',—he, who had never seen those strange lands, those lands which, in battle, were so much stranger still. 'We're doing grand,' he would say, on the good days, and, on the bad days—'I doubt there mun be summat aslew.' And always he said—'Just bide a bit till our lads git agate! They'll give yon Jarma bullnecks for sewer!'

The tramps went off the road. He saw them no more, coming reading up the hill. The lawyer went, and the Squire. And the youth went from the village.

There were still folk enough for a chat, but his vitality died down. It was as if, with the young life ebbing from the place, his old life went out to ocean, too. He had a son killed in France, who had chafed to get to the Front. 'Our Bob, he mun aye be at t'fore-end!' was all he said.

Time dragged on,—the Big Piece of Time that was all War. Sometimes the chestnuts were decked with candles for the spring-feast, sometimes they were burning bushes flaring autumn tints, and sometimes their bare black branches were crystal-edged with rime. The imperishable heroes of the village never came back, but the old road-scraper was happy, because he died first. In the young green of his last spring evening he said—'Bide a bit till our lads git agate!'

## THE OLDEST ARMY

MILES was ploughing in a snowy swirl of dipping, screaming gulls. The February day was clear, and pale blue like the dull linen of his ploughman's coat. There was a brown network of hedges wherever he looked, and the earth was brown that polished the share. Southward his father's farm in a clump of trees set like a black feather plume in a soft gray hat. The horses put hoof before hoof in a shortened stride that seemed always on the point of arrest, yet were stately, rhythmical and smooth.

His father came down the field, an old, rheumatic man with eyes that looked about him all the time. When the horses turned at the furrow end he spoke, raising his voice, for a wrestling fall had left Miles deaf.

'You'll ha' heard, likely, about Garnett Fold? Squire's letter it to his youngest lad,—him as was lamed in t'War,—and there's to be a boon-plough to-morn. You can take a team across and give 'em a hand.'

Miles said 'Reet' and went away down his line. His morose expression did not change, though he was pleased enough by the news. All the neighbouring farms would send teams, so he would see his friends, and afterwards there would be a feed. There would also be a new pair of ploughing-cords for the first man to arrive,—not that *he* would win them, of course. He never won anything, he was never first. It was always his lot to be down and out.

There was this War, now, still dragging on.

He had not wanted to go, at the start. He had his job, a job to which he had been bred, and it was inconceivable that he could leave it for anything else. He had railed at his brother when he went, but he ceased to rail when Jim died at the Marne. He knew himself left behind according to rule, and through his own fault, but when he raged to mend it and be off, he found himself tied. Exempt against his will, he was none the happier for knowing that in any case he would fail to pass. He did not want glory, whatever that might be, or a uniform and a gun, or cigarettes and cheers. He just wanted to be 'in it', as Jim had been, no matter whether, like Jim, he never came out. That was the chief thing about 'this Army', as he called it to himself, you were doing the same as everybody else. But here he was alone, instead of out with the crowd, and with gulls screaming over him instead of shells. He was always last and left out, the last man that England needed for her cause.

They talked about the boon-plough at home. 'You mun makeshapetowintheyreins', his mother said. 'It's about time you won summat, I'm sure! You've never been nowt yet nobbut duck-egg!'

'Clock reet?' he asked, and his father roared—'Clock'll see *ye* out!' deeply wrath. The clock on the stairs was old and queer, in that it lacked the deep voice of its kind, but it was steady and exact, and his father's pride. It had once been used for hoarding gold, perhaps it was then that it had learned to be dumb. 'Ay, but it stopped—' he began, and stopped himself, for he remembered that night—the night before Jim went away,—and stopped, too .

'Gov'nment's wanting more plough,' his father said 'Plough's going to win the War. Farmers is saviours and such-like and a deal more. It were another tale a while back, you'll think on, but they can't make too much on us now'

This was old hearing, and Miles went to bed, though he slept little through the night. Things kept coming back that Jim had said before he left,—Jim's halting, dim-heard exposition of fellowship and sacrifice and life beyond death. Early, he groped downstairs, as he had groped with Jim, and, now as then, struck a match as he passed the clock. It was so dark that he feared rain, but it was fine when he got outside. The clock had warned him, though, to make haste and he hurried over the team, grooming them by the light of the horn lanthorn on the wall. He must have them smartened a bit for young Mr John. Young Mr John had been 'in it', too, and had come out of it lamed for life, but he was happy enough, Miles thought, as he plaited and brushed. It was those who hadn't been in it who were dowly and dour.

When they got out, the dawn was showing over the hedge-tops and the curves of the land, and he sent the horses fast through the lane. Their hoofs and the jangle of steel rang across the waking fields, a dog barked and a cock crew and a bird twittered on the hedge, but it all came faint to his ear. His spirits rose as he approached Garnett Fold, for it was not yet light, but as he entered the lane to the house he had a shock, for the lane was full of horses and men. He could see their heads over the fence,

shadowy and dark, and, through the fence, hints of burnished steel They parted before him right and left into the fields, spreading away blurred and ghostly in the dusk 'They're turning a deal o' land,' he thought, half-stopping to gape, for it seemed to him that he did not know the men, and even the horses were all strange There were Shires, like his own, with proud necks and rich hair, and fine Clydesdales, and sturdy Suffolks with short legs That French horse, too, that was making such a stir,—what for the land's sake was this lot doing here? Squire must have fetched them from his other estates He was a terble chap for ideas, was Squire And on more than one slope he could see boggle-like shapes with caterpillar wheels and queer, curved blades, ploughing three and four furrows at a time, and with never a horse to them at all They were silent enough to his dim ear, but he knew the fields must be alive with their noise, and yet his team never raised their heads . . . It was an army, he thought,—that word for ever in his mind,—stretching away to the sky-line and beyond, an army fighting the old battle with the land And even this army had got ahead of him, too, he was out of it, not 'in', left and last, the late-comer, the duck-egg . . .

He came upon Mr John, whistling softly beside a gate The field behind him looked empty in the growing light

'I doubt I'm late, sir,' Miles began, and Mr John laughed

'You're first by a long chalk, my lad! Clock wrong, perhaps? Anyhow, you've won the ribbons all right . . .'

## SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON

FROM the first he heard the rifle's message. Out of the local book-shop, where the dreams of men stood for sale in colour and gold, he stepped blinking into the red light of war. He had lived in a world of his own, drawing visions from a dim title or a skimmed page, but he stirred at the nation's call, and was caught swiftly into the new ranks. He came in his turn to the range, and when for the first time he touched the yellow, gray-nosed toys that can kill across miles, he felt a quick shrinking from the clean little death he held in his hand. He trembled as he drew the gun close. But after he had fired the first shot he forgot that this was no safe peace-game such as the sorting and cataloguing of books. He thrilled with a new sense of power, with pride in the fine mechanism, exultation at the sharp reply. The rifle was his servant, his to command. A little later, he loved it, gathered it to him, as a child. And, later still,—but that was not just yet.

Owing to shortage of instructors, a girl was teaching him, a quiet, pleasant girl, whose professional handling of the weapons filled him with awe. He liked her from the first, and, the weeks went by, the liking grew to admiration, and more, so that a thread of romance was woven into the dream.

But the rifle itself was the root of the dream. One of the Martinis taken by hundreds from the Boers, and afterwards adapted for club, it

set his mind leaping at the mere touch The very stamp on it brought things so near, carried him away into the heart of the long South African struggle

'Makes me creep a bit,' he said to the girl, as she talked, explaining and demonstrating 'That gun may have killed heaps of our men; even, perhaps,—though it isn't likely,—somebody we've known And now it's teaching an enemy to shoot Seems queer, doesn't it?'

'Well, but that's all over,' she said, smiling 'We're not enemies, now Why, the Boers are wanting to fight for us! And it's only a rifle You talk as though it was alive'

'It seems alive, don't you think? It's so quick and true, so smart at doing what you want It's got a voice, too They always say in books that a rifle speaks I reckon it's alive all right'

'How you imagine things! What can it matter to a rifle whose hand pulls it off?'

'It may matter You can't tell They say folks and their feelings make a difference to the things we call dead,—houses and furniture and implements, and so on Some people believe you can make them feel the same, if only you mean it hard enough yourself You never know when a really strong thought dies Some folk can't sleep in a room where there's been any kind of a fight, because the evil and the hate are still working and alive Now when this rifle belonged to the Boers, they were hating us like wild beasts, and longing to smash us out and out Perhaps the man who owned it hid many a day behind kopjes and things, aching to plug a shot into one of our chaps Seems as if some

of what he felt *must* have gone into the gun, and,—who knows?—perhaps it's there still.'

'Well, it's shut up pretty fast, if it is!' she laughed 'It shoots as true for us as ever it did for the Boers. Lots of people have used it, but nobody ever thought of such a thing before'

'It wouldn't come to everybody,' he said thoughtfully 'Crowds of folk would sleep through twenty murders—real ones—and never stir an eyelash. A gun might have to wait and wait and go on waiting before it found somebody who could hear what it had to say. It might have to wait for a time like this, with the air just tingling and hot, before it could get the old blood-lust awake. And even then it might have to wait again,—for a special sign'

'Yes, and it will go on waiting!' she retorted briskly 'It won't find the man it wants here'

'No I was only just wondering. But supposing you *could* hear it speak, and after a bit it began to tell you all the things it felt,—its love for its own cause and its own men, and its hatred for the others,—and you couldn't help listening? You might even begin to feel for it and understand, and see what it saw and hear what it heard. And then, one day, perhaps, when you were listening, and feeling sorry—'

'You'll be sorry enough in the trenches, thinking of the time you've wasted' she told him firmly. 'Get that strap round your elbow, and go ahead. The Germans will be here before you've done talking'

He took the reproof meekly, and dropped to his place. The dark shop had not yet damaged his sight, and he improved in strid. She gave

him encouragement, and, at last, praise, but above her words the under-mutter of the rifle grew daily in his ears

He began to picture the man who had owned it, the blond, bearded giant who had made nothing of its weight. After a while he saw him plainly in his rough, loose clothes and broad-brimmed hat. He saw the zinc-roofed building he called home, with its dull red walls, and its *stoep* before it. Sometimes he looked inside and saw dark twists of Boer tobacco, colourless Cape brandy, a waggon chest or an old clasp Bible.

That was in peace, before the *rooibaatjes* came to be killed. The voice spoke faintly at first, and without the burr of hate. Soon he began to feel the unrest that had swept the limitless veldt. He saw men gathered in knots, plotting low and then loud, afterwards armed and drilled. Enmity grew, knitting itself in links from mouth to mouth until the fighting chain was formed. The rifle spoke clearer, and behind it he seemed to hear the guttural urging of his country's foes.

He came every day to the range, and he plugged his neat, consistent holes, he saw the vision-pictures rise and pass. All were ready now in the dream. The gun in his hand was looking ahead, thirsting for blood, just as the man behind it thirsted, waiting for the word. On the dream-day that war was declared, it turned hot in his grasp, quivering and alive. He dropped it under Miss Dunn's surprised stare.

One evening he turned up nearly played out with the pitiless drill in the unusual warmth. His regiment was seething with hope, for it was

certain to be off soon His brain whirled and dragged between heat and fatigue and the fieriest, headiest draught that is ever drunk by man. Miss Dunn was glad for him, yet plainly regretful to lose him, and presently he found himself saying what he had not thought it right to say, the Martini laid aside. She did not stop him, rather, it seemed, found it sweet in the saying, even though every sentence ended with the same clause—‘when,—or *if*—I come back’ The shadows grew slowly at their feet The sun leaned towards the sea At their left a quarryman was still at work, whistling sweetly in snatches On the right, a golfer or two wandered slowly round the links Behind, on the road, the folk went down to the town

She set him to work again at last, shooting with him, shot for shot He obeyed mechanically, his tired mind, after the day’s strain, drugged into languor by the new sweetness and content But the present went out like a lamp as he took the rifle up, drawing the ammunition from his pocket Through every vein ran the fire of lust to kill that keeps a man unafraid in the face of odds He was at Modder against Methuen, and in his rage of purpose was one with the Boers Then came the trenches at Magersfontein, where in the dark and the rain the barbed wire waited for the Highland Brigade Then he was at the Tugela, against Buller, at Rensburg, against French The blood roared in his ears, and his eyes were red with the hate of his own kin It seemed to him that the rifle sang, thundered and purred, hot and happy in his hands All these years it had

waited, a toy for players at the great game, until the coming of the moment and the man. Now, out of this dreamer and his dreams it had bred to itself a son of vengeance, a soul to fill with its insupportable need.

Khaki came up from the town, singing happily as it passed. It stopped at the wall, and hailed them from afar. Hartley heard it, and looked round, got to his feet. In the hand on the wall was a gaudy tin 'Jack', bright in the setting sun.

His first shot took the khaki in the chest, just where it showed above the cam. The second met the quarryman as he turned. Then, his fingers at his pocket, he swung round towards the links. A white head bent to a ball on the last green.

Miss Dunn crouched on the ground, her loaded gun in chill hands. But when she saw his face,—the face that had grown dear,—she was no longer afraid. She fired first.

## EVERLASTING FIRE

ONCE this was the hill of the great god Bel  
Every year, as it came, men lighted a fire  
to him up there It is only a little while, as  
time goes, since they stopped, in the lives of our  
grandfathers, perhaps

Such a little while since the needfire went,  
too, the clean wild fire of the out-of-doors, that  
was carried for healing from farm to farm

On dale-hearths which no stranger knows still  
burn the peat-fires of a hundred years

. . . Moor-fires, running lightly along the  
ground, and wandering pillars of fire, of which  
men speak below their breath

Surely the fire-charmers are not dead, even  
yet?

Fire is always the First Magic in the hands of  
men We in our rooms see great lamps flash  
across our beds, and in the fields the cattle open  
their eyes Across the night-skies the furnaces  
make late sunsets of their own The red scarves  
of the trains stream behind them on the dark

Over the still roofs are the fiery eyes of a  
flying Death . . .

## SPEEDING UP, 1917

BECAUSE Death has quickened his pace, we, too, must run fast. We must speed up our lives to escape him, and at the next corner we shall run into his arms. But those that come after will meet him only at the end of the long lane, in the sunset.

The ordinary pageant of death is quickened insanely, like cinema-pictures speeded beyond truth. The living must move at cinema-speed, too. They race through their hasty days, and cannot dream through their scamped nights. They tear through the veil of mystery that hides their coming, and are gone again before the rents are closed.

In factory and office, yard and mine, they have worked double tides. Armies were made between the winter sowing and the spring. Then they came to the land, and said 'Speed up the land'.

But they could not speed up Nature. There were snow and frost and big winds and snow again, and always when the land was loosed a little, the frost returned. When at last it eased off, they sent ploughs that hurried behind machines and huge wheels, bumping and tearing up the land. In near fields they were ploughing with horses, smooth as gliding keels, in a cloud of gulls so thick that you could hear the wings brush as they passed, and in all the furrows were little birds. But where they speeded up the land there was neither gull nor little bird.

And then there was more snow . . .

They have speeded the plough, but they cannot speed the green shoots for the ewes and the young lambs. They turn the furrow, but they cannot quicken the seed. The buds have not hastened a whit for the frenzied rush of man, nor the coloured crocus-carpets over the lawns. Only in the appointed time the little cypress and the weeping ash stood charmed in a ring of snowdrops round their feet.

They have speeded our daylight. Our racing lives shall see longer days and fewer moons. The clocks strike wrong against the sun. But the shadows lie where they used to do at the hour of worship. The rooks go home as of old.

## A MAP OF SILK

MY grandmother made this map when she was at school. That was about the time of Waterloo, when other folks were making maps, too. Now they are busy at the job again.

She was gray-eyed, and very neat, I think, and even then rather stern and strong. Her miniature when she was old is like that, with a straight glance and a curved but close-shut mouth. Everything about her is rather severe, even to the folds of her flung-back veil. But there are velvet bracelets on her wrists.

It was she who drew Europe on white silk. It is framed in a gilded oval frame, and an embroidered wreath runs round of delicate greens and gold. The map itself is outlined in chenille.

Europe has not taken kindly to the oval form. It is a little squeezed at the sides, a little elongated north and south. Germany, in the midst, looks pressed upon, hemmed in.

There is a certain casual treatment in the names. Scotland has none, neither Portugal nor Wales, but Corsica has hers, and all her sister isles. (It *must* have been the time of Waterloo.) 'Part of Asia' is labelled to the East, 'Part of Africa' to the South. 'Barbary' lies along the desert sand. The 'Frozen Ocean' strides across the North.

Very soon there will be no map. Some years ago it began to rot, and lately it has gone fast. It is yellow and full of rents and the chenille is coming away. Belgium is in ruins, the Balkans are in holes. Germany's outlines are drifting.

from their place But in the British Isles is  
neither hole nor broken thread

Soon there will be no more map, but the  
wreath will remain A hundred years have not  
touched it with stain or tear The greens and  
gold grow more delicate with age

No woman of our time will draw Europe on  
silk The weight of blood and tears would rive  
the stuff across The women of to-day have  
graved it on tempered steel But round that,  
too, is a wreath that will never fade

## EYES

IT is good, when you are old, to have no strangers about your door—not to be afraid of strange eyes. Those that follow you see you a whole, knowing what made and finished you, and where your life touched theirs. The cottager keeps step with the Squire, marking the big milestones on the other's road by the smaller milestones on his own. The eyes are full of memory that are yours as well, and therefore they can never be strange. They have watched with you the twisting ribbon of the years; at the same altar they have been lifted up. They have looked at the same folk when living, they remember for ever the same dead, and night and day they have known the spell of the countryside.

But now the web of association is all torn across. The fine weaving of the centuries is all to weave again. They will come back with stranger eyes, the lads we knew. Behind them will be the deserts of Egypt and the land where the Euphrates flows, the greater desert between the Somme and the Aisne, all that life and death and hell which we have never shared. Their country eyes may return with the years, but they will be strange again when they are old. We shall not see what they see—the long brown troops and the shell-lit nights. They will not see what we see—the honeysuckle lanes and the fields of new-mown hay.

But we shall all be laid at last in the same soil. We shall open our eyes together on the same God . . .

## VIOLINS IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN

I HEARD them before I turned the top of the hill. Just for a moment I caught them across the field and over the high wall where the yellow plum-tree grows. Then I lost them as I dropped down and the houses came in between.

The young lime-trees on the green were evening-sweet. The sun was going, but still hung above the sea. The sky was an amethyst set in a gold band.

Through the lilac I peered, tramp-like, by the gate, and saw the players on the lawn, with their shining fiddles and their thin bows. The notes went up, shining and thin, over the hay-field and the roof-tops, and down to the river and out to the sea. High in the air they broke and scattered abroad, trembling a little as they fled.

Sweet,—sweet, beauty spoken aloud by the only lips that need no words. I caught at it in its flight that I might speak it, too, and now am dumber than before.

A light breeze fluttered the music on the stands, and the damp settled a little on the lawn. I saw the houses in the village go gray, and purple come into the shadows on the hills. Under the lilac grew a little mist.

The fiddles were put away, silk-covered and leather-cased. The air quivered and cried awhile when they ceased, and then was stiller than before. But one plucked a string before he laid it to rest. I know the garden rang with it all night.



# POEMS IN PROSE



## LAMPS IN THE DARK

LAST night I was going fast along the road when out of the hidden fields there grew a house. Just when I saw it first it was a house, and then it was only a blur against the dark. It was like a piece of the dark that you could hold between your finger and thumb . . .

All the windows were holes of light, soft as mimosa and yellow as golden-rod. Behind them, I knew, there were no rooms, only globes of gold. On the other side of them again there was nothing but the dark.

They were set at random in the face of the house,—like voices calling out of the night, each knowing not that another also speaks. In front of them were the tall bars of branchless trees, a hedge of black lances which no moon could silver and no wind shake.

But all the time I was going fast along the road, swooping into black pits and soaring out again on wings. I drove at barriers rooted as the hills, and always a hand removed them at the last. The sky was scattered with masses of cloud like black hay torn from a wain. The stars walked between on levels of blue, like queens on smooth terraces by the sea.

House after house lay waiting me as I drove. They signalled afar off from the fells or peered under meadow-rises beside the streams. Always they greeted me as I came, and then their eyes looked past me and beyond. Always I left them staring behind me at things I could not see. I was glad when I was coming towards the eyes,

and lonely and outcast when I fled away Panic seized me at last, because I had left them all behind You see, I was going so fast along the road .

I came to my house at my journey's end, and my house was dark God had drunk of the river that runs below in the day He had cleft the wall of the eastern hills and let the east wind through All over the garden the dark had stolen the flowers.

Then somebody lighted a lamp inside my house I waited for it to stare behind and beyond me, and then pass . . But it looked at me softly and steadily, and stayed There it stayed, waiting, as love stays

I knew then as I watched that the other lights still burned Other men looked at them and possessed their souls Lamps do not flicker and die because of a wayfarer in the dark And lives, which are eternal, do not cease because for a moment one passes out of sight

It is only because we are going so fast along the road

## EGOTISM

I AM standing in the shadow of a black house  
The sky is primrose and shining, clear as a  
new-polished pearl, but I am lost in the shadow  
of the black house

The roof against the sky is like the edge of a  
sharp knife, the birds crossing the sky can be  
seen for miles; but I am standing in the shadow  
of the black house

Nobody sees me, nobody knows I am here  
I am drowned in the pool of the shadow of the  
black house.

The evening voices come along the air, the  
voice of bird and child and little lamb, but I  
am standing in the shadow of the black house

I call very loud, I deafen myself with my  
voice, but nobody hears I am stifled by the  
shadow of the black house

Some day I shall climb to the roof, and hang  
myself to the gable My black body will swing  
back and forth against the primrose sky, and  
everyone will know that I am there .. But  
will my soul be left standing in the shadow of  
the black house?

## BRIGHTNESS FALLS FROM THE AIR ..

ONE side of the lawn is yellow house and glass  
Two sides are towering wall, with a trellis  
of japonica and fig, and a border of wallflower  
and lilies at the foot The fourth side is a living  
wall of deep copper beech

The sun goes flicker, flicker through it on the  
grass, and the heavy branches sway lightly, and  
the lowest window of the house has the cool,  
dark velvet glassiness of a deep pool Under its  
boughs you can see the drive and more trees  
beyond, syringa, laburnum and ash, and a wall  
that is all moss and tiny fern and peeping  
feathered heads There is another house over  
the road, and when the dusk begins to come  
down a yellow light burns through the beech,  
like a lamp set high in the tree As the dusk  
deepens, the beech grows blacker and blacker in  
the paling air, and, standing under it, you are  
shut away in a warm sweet world, vibrating  
with the steady chord of the bees

The glass houses were all dazzling in the sun  
before it went down Now they are a little  
ghostly, like still ponds seen in the gray of eve,  
and through the glass the scarlet and pink  
flowers show bright, like flowers under water  
that are yet not drowned At one end of the  
lawn are little diamond beds, that have each a  
shower rambler set in their midst, like a splendid  
bouquet growing for a bride

A Persian kitten walks along the flat-topped  
wall, a soft, dark shape against the opal sky  
The light over the sea grows brighter, the blue

overhead more opaque and rich Between the two is a strip of pale blue in which the moon comes up, a thin curl of pale gold, like a shred from the edge of a coin, and near it is the evening star

Behind the diamond beds is a door in the high wall Through it is a garden all a jumble with mignonette and cabbages, poppies and sweet peas Between borders of box, cinder-paths crush gently under your feet On either side of you are little apple-trees heavy with fruit, stout little dwarfs marching step by step with you as you go They reach out across the paths to pluck you by the arm, or sweep dew-wet fingers across your face

Between the box you come at the low wall, set with currant bushes, black and white Through the apple-trees the poppies gleam up scarlet and white in the faint tangles of mist steadily weaving below the boughs Across the broad field there are cottages in the lane The lights begin in them, one by one, and the lamp still burns in the beech On the road to the left, where the chestnuts are thick in leaf, figures saunter or flash by, amid voices and the warm gleams of little lamps From the yard behind the house come thin, clear laughter and distant snatches of speech

The cows are lying down in the grass, the white among the roan spectral in the dusk They lie warm on the warm earth, cool in the cool air, still in a quiet that is yet all soft breathing and sighs, and the sleepy sound of gently-moving jaws

From a farmhouse under some hill a dog

barks, sudden and angry and clear, and then as suddenly is still An owl calls fr<sup>o</sup> the farm-buildings belonging to the house As the night deepens it calls louder and ventures farther A bat dips and circles, its curved shape dark against the stretch of ether-blue which holds the moon The whole earth smells sweet, damp, rich, more alive in the sudden hush and dew of sleep, as perhaps we shall be more truly alive in the sleep that is called Death

## FULL MOON

THE moon makes strange monsters on the sign-boards of the inns. The steps running up the house-sides have slanting shadows cutting them across. The stone stairs in this house, white as drift, are curved like a bow with use and age.

The moonlight is very cool on the passage walls. The floors slope and sag beneath your uncertain feet. All the way there are shafts from deep-set windows at the side.

This room has a chimney wide to the sky, so that the moon climbs its way down. Here there are two great beds, mahogany and oak,—the red mahogany that is like spilt wine in the evening sun, and the black oak that no sun can charm into colour or glow.

Two old ladies sleep between the green rep curtains and the red, old ladies with frilled caps and thin, fine-fingered hands. They wake together in the night as those wake who have slept for long in the same room. What do they say to each other in the summer night?

There must be strange things in the room of their minds,—faces we have never seen, voices we have not heard, shadows in corners that we could not find. Tapestries beautiful or strange, china figures and harps, gleams of silver and Indian silks and mother-of-pearl. The windows are old gems, set with apple-blossom and emerald grass.

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